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The Agrarian Movement in  
Illinois, 1880-1896



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*The Agrarian Movement in Illinois*  
1880-1896



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1880-1896

ROY V. SCOTT

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## Preface

Historians have long been aware of the importance of the Populist party in American history. In seeking its roots, they have examined the farmers' alliances, and logically enough, they have studied them in those states and regions where Populism was most successful and where it most dramatically altered politics. But the alliance movement was not limited to the plains states or the South; it flourished in other areas as well. This monograph is a study of the five agricultural organizations which constituted the alliance uprising in Illinois. In it, I have attempted to account for the rise of rural associations, to describe their purposes and programs, and to explain the failure of Illinois farmers to support the Populist party. I have not concerned myself with the earlier Grangers, although there is definite need for such an examination, nor have I discussed in any detail the Populist party in Illinois since it is the contention of this study that the necessary foundations of that political group were destroyed almost before its appearance.

The bibliography contains only those items which I found useful in the preparation of the study. As guides to the general literature on the subject, I refer the reader to the bibliographical sections in Fred A. Shannon's *Farmer's Last Frontier* and John D. Hicks's *Populist Revolt* and to Everett E. Edwards' *Bibliography of the History of Agriculture in the United States*. I have unearthed some of the materials listed in the bibliography in the homes of descendants of persons mentioned in the text. Because of the nature of the subject and the general failure of agricultural leaders to leave personal manuscripts, I have placed considerable reliance on newspaper and magazine sources. Only by their utilization, in fact, can the student discover information concerning the local groups and lesser leaders which constitutes a complete picture. With few exceptions, however, the newspapers and farm journals consulted are easily available in major libraries within the state.

In the preparation of this monograph, I am indebted to a number of friends and associates. The study in its original form was written under the direction of Professor Fred A. Shannon of the University of Illinois. His suggestions and criticisms are apparent on every



page, but the inspiration one receives from him cannot be so easily measured. Professor Robert M. Sutton of the University of Illinois, by his friendly advice and good sense, made a greater contribution than he knows. Professor Howard L. Scamhorn of the University of Colorado, Professor Wayne C. Temple of Lincoln Memorial University, and Professor Gene D. Lewis of the University of Cincinnati are only three of my former colleagues to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Professor Amos E. Simpson of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Professor Glover Moore of Mississippi State University, and Mr. Robert M. Albert of the University of Illinois read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions. The editors of *Agricultural History* and the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* generously permitted me to use material that appeared previously in those journals. Miss Julaine A. Brayford, Miss Peggy Pruitt, and Mrs. Ann Chenney performed yeoman service in typing the manuscript. Finally, I must thank my wife, Jane Angeline Scott, whose love and devotion made completion of the study possible. I am solely responsible for any errors in fact or interpretation that may remain.

R. V. S.

*Mississippi State University*  
*September 1, 1961*

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Nature of Discontent in Illinois

The evolution of a national economy after the Civil War forced agriculture to adjust to novel conditions and to develop techniques by which farmers might protect themselves in the new competitive society. When the typical farm lost whatever self-sufficiency it once possessed and became a commercial unit using raw materials, capital, and labor to produce a commodity for the market, the sturdy yeoman became a businessman. However, the transformation for many was neither pleasant nor profitable. The forces creating commercial agriculture produced an industrial order in which the power of organized business and labor seemed to threaten the farmer's place in society and, perhaps, his existence. The farmer reacted with vigor and, in the eyes of conservatives, with violence. But while Mary E. Lease, a well-known agrarian leader, might strike terror in the hearts of the timid, and easterners might wish that Kansas could be civilized, the conduct of the embattled farmer was both logical and understandable. The phenomenon which urban elements labeled agrarian radicalism was basically an attempt by commercial farmers to use the techniques of business to protect their investment, produce at a profit, and secure a fair share of the consumer dollar.

Farmers are individualists, but they have never hesitated to organize for their own protection or mutual benefit. Neighborhood cooperation was a characteristic of frontier life, and the stresses of industrialism caused farmers to form combinations on the regional and national levels. The Patrons of Husbandry flourished in the 1870's, achieving its greatest success in the four states along the upper Mississippi River. Aided by a political situation which allowed independent legislators to exercise great influence, the farmers there secured partial relief from the abuses of railroads and learned the value of agrarian organization. The apparent success of the program, combined with failures in unwise business ventures, dislike for the secrecy and official nonpartisanship of the order, and farmer inertia, led to a rapid decline of the Grange after 1875.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Solon J. Buck, *The Granger Movement* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1913), chart following p. 64, pp. 149-194.

The Populist party developed out of a second agrarian reform movement. Arising from the farmers' alliances and other groups, which embraced and enlarged the granger program, the new crusade seemed destined for even greater successes when, unwisely adopting free silver as its central objective, it was submerged by the Democratic party in 1896. In contrast to the earlier Grangers, the Populists registered their greatest successes in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and western Minnesota. In those states in 1892, James B. Weaver received 319,802 votes, or almost one-third of his total strength, and Kansas alone cast more Populist ballots than did the remaining seven states of the north central division.<sup>2</sup>

But the relative weakness of the farmer candidate in the old granger stronghold did not mean an absence of agrarian agitation. In fact, throughout the 1880's and into the next decade, agricultural organizations flourished there as farmers engaged in cooperative buying and selling, attempted to improve their social and educational status, and, on occasion, ventured into politics to correct abuses.

The Grange, after a decade of declining fortunes, began a revival in the 1880's and slowly regained power. Between 1885 and 1896, 2,000 new locals were established and three or four times that number of dormant granges were revived. Although the center of the order's strength gradually shifted from the Mississippi Valley to the North Atlantic states,<sup>3</sup> the Grange was an important component of the alliance movement in the Middle West.

The failure of the Grange to take full advantage of a new wave of discontent after 1880 was due in part to the rise of new and more aggressive organizations. Most important of the new groups were the National Farmers' Alliance and the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association. The former, organized in Chicago in 1880, spread rapidly through the old granger states and claimed a membership of 24,500 in 940 alliances as early as 1881. Nine years later, spokesmen said it included 13 state alliances and 400,000 farmers.<sup>4</sup> Competing

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. McKee, *The National Conventions and Platforms of All Political Parties, 1789-1900* (Friedenwald Company, Baltimore, 3rd ed., 1900), p. 287.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas C. Atkeson, *Semi-Centennial History of the Patrons of Husbandry* (Orange Judd Company, New York, 1916), pp. 99, 133-192; Buck, *Granger Movement*, chart following p. 64; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1890 (Philadelphia, 1890), p. 22; *ibid.*, 1891, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (October 23, 1880), 340; *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1881, p. 7; William A. Pepper, "The Farmers' Defensive Movement," *Forum*,



with the National or Northern Alliance in such states as Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa was the F.M.B.A., which originated in southern Illinois in 1883. Seven years later, it had 107,000 members in six states.<sup>5</sup> In addition to these leaders, other farm groups operated with varying degrees of success in the Middle West. Among them was the Agricultural Wheel, an Arkansas product, which appeared in Missouri in 1886 and established a few locals in Wisconsin the following year. Organizers of the Southern Alliance entered Kansas and Missouri in 1887 and, after failing to establish a federation with the northern group in 1889, sent representatives into the remaining north central states. Finally, the Patrons of Industry, established in Michigan in 1887, had followers in seventeen states, including seven in the Middle West, by 1889.<sup>6</sup>

Although discontent existed in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin and was reflected in a diversity of farm organizations, it did not, in the main, convert Republican and Democratic farmers into militant Populists. To a large degree, the explanation may be found in economic conditions. The patterns of middle western Populism indicate that the party achieved its greatest strength in areas located relatively near the frontier, where speculative excesses were most extreme and public and private debts were higher, where greatest emphasis was placed on cereal production and evils growing from that system of farming were most pronounced, and where the climate was regularly or occasionally unfit for normal agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

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XIII (December, 1889), 473; E. A. Allen, *Labor and Capital* (Central Publishing House, Cincinnati, 1891), p. 393.

<sup>5</sup> Fred G. Blood, *Handbook and History of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union* (Washington, 1893), p. 59; John P. Stelle, *Uncle John's F.M.B.A. Song Book* (F.M.B.A. Publishing Company, Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 8th ed., 1891), pp. 1-2; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890 (F.M.B.A. Publishing Company, Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 1890), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance* (J. H. Rice and Sons, Fort Scott, Kansas, 1889), pp. 115, 117; Nelson A. Dunning, ed., *Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Alliance Publishing Company, Washington, 1891), pp. 240-244, 248; Louis A. Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1924), pp. 110-111; Sidney Glazer, "Patrons of Industry in Michigan," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXIV (September, 1937), 186-187.

<sup>7</sup> Herman C. Nixon, "The Populist Movement in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XXIV (January, 1926), 15, 58, 75; John D. Barnhart, "Rainfall and the Populist Party in Nebraska," *American Political Science Review*, XIX (August, 1925), 539-540; Raymond C. Miller, "The Background of Populism in Kansas," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XI (March, 1925), 469-489.

The economic bases of Populism were present in all of their aspects in Kansas and Nebraska, for example, but they were largely absent in Illinois where farmers were protected from the worst abuses and most adverse conditions. Fully settled, more heavily populated, and becoming industrialized, Illinois by 1890 was no longer the semifrontier state which was the scene of the granger agitation in the 1870's. While homesteaders and others rushed into Kansas and Nebraska in the 1880's, practically no new land was taken in Illinois, and its rate of population increase lagged behind the national gain. During 1880-90, the population of the Prairie State rose 26 per cent, Nebraska's population increased 134 per cent, and Kansas registered a 43 per cent gain. Moreover, the 26 per cent increase in Illinois represented a gain solely in urban population. Only two states in the north central division—Illinois and Ohio—showed a loss of rural population in 1890, and the decline in Illinois was five times that of Ohio.<sup>8</sup>

The drain of people from the farms and rural communities of Illinois pointed to the rapid development of industry and commerce. By 1890 Illinois was the most extensively industrialized state in the north central division. Almost 39 per cent of the people lived in towns and cities of 8,000 or more population,<sup>9</sup> and only 38 per cent of the gainfully employed male population worked in agriculture; Kansas and Nebraska had 61 and 51 per cent similarly employed. At the same census, Illinois reported 20,842 manufacturing concerns worth \$500,000,000 and employing 312,198 workers while Kansas listed less than a fourth as many businesses worth less than a tenth as much and employing only a tenth as many persons. Nebraska showed even a lower level of industrial development than its neighbor to the south.<sup>10</sup>

Since the movement into Kansas and Nebraska was primarily rural in nature and represented a typical frontier expansion, the migration created a false demand for land and internal improvements, resulting in a speculative boom in both rural and urban property which continued until the winter of 1887-88. When the collapse came, due to falling prices for farm commodities, drought, and speculative excesses, the plains states were faced with reduced land

<sup>8</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1895 (Washington, 1896), p. 365; *U.S. Tenth Census: Compendium*, Part I, p. 7; *U.S. Twelfth Census: Abstract*, pp. 35-36; *U.S. Eleventh Census: Population*, Part I, p. lxx.

<sup>9</sup> *U.S. Twelfth Census: Statistics of Populations*, Part I, p. lxxxii.

<sup>10</sup> *U.S. Eleventh Census: Compendium*, Part III, p. 379; *U.S. Eleventh Census: Abstract*, pp. 141-142.

values, overpowering public and private debts, high taxes, and other indications of a deteriorating economic order.<sup>11</sup> Illinois avoided this typical speculative boom and its sickening collapse. Not only were indications of overexpansion, such as excessive railroad construction, largely absent, but taxation and farm indebtedness were less burdensome. In Kansas the total public debt more than doubled during the ten years between 1880 and 1890, and on a per capita basis, it increased from \$16.00 to \$28.00. Conditions in Nebraska, while not so extreme, were similar as the debt was doubled, but a greater relative population gain prevented the per capita debt from increasing. Illinois, by contrast, reduced her bonded indebtedness by more than \$4,000,000 and her per capita figure by 50 per cent.<sup>12</sup> The character of the states' public debts was reflected in their tax patterns. Consequently, while the average per capita valuation of real and personal property in Illinois was greater than in the plains states, the taxes paid in the Prairie State were significantly less.

Public indebtedness, however, was overshadowed by private debts in the form of real estate mortgages on farm property. Here again the plains farmers were clearly at a disadvantage. In January, 1890, Kansas had 203,000 mortgages amounting to \$175,000,000 and drawing \$15,000,000 as the annual interest charge. Over 60 per cent of the taxed acres of the state carried a debt of \$6.57 each. Nebraska was not far behind with 55 per cent of all taxed acres supporting 107,000 mortgages worth \$91,000,000. Illinois had 129,000 mortgages worth \$165,000,000 at the same time, but only 31 per cent of the taxed acres were covered. Mortgages in Illinois were larger and the debt on each encumbered acre was over twice as large, but the land was more valuable and the interest rate was lower, averaging 7 per cent as compared to 8.5 per cent in the two western states. Finally, between 1880 and 1889 the amount of real estate debts increased much more rapidly in Kansas and Nebraska than in Illinois.<sup>13</sup>

Not only did the typical farmer in Kansas and Nebraska suffer from the results of a speculative boom after 1887, but he was further handicapped by less diversification, less improved land, higher transportation costs, more grasping middlemen, and adverse weather conditions. As a result, falling prices for farm commodities, especially for the cereals, created greater hardship in the plains states than in the older areas east of the Mississippi River.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, "Populism in Kansas," pp. 470-471, 474-475, 477-478, 482.

<sup>12</sup> *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1895, pp. 352-353.

<sup>13</sup> *U.S. Eleventh Census: Abstract*, pp. 198, 201, 216-219.

By 1890 there were three great agricultural belts in the Middle West. Most important was the corn-livestock belt extending from Ohio through Iowa and beginning to move into eastern Kansas and Nebraska. North of this area, especially in southern Michigan, northern Illinois, and southern Wisconsin, was a section devoted to dairy farming. Finally, extending from central Kansas to the Canadian border was a grain farming district.<sup>14</sup> While not all plains farmers were primarily grain producers, the typical Kansas farmer devoted more attention to such crops and maintained fewer dairy cows, beef cattle, hogs, and sheep than did his Illinois contemporary. The Illinois farm possessed a further advantage by having 10 per cent more improved land than the typical farm in Kansas.<sup>15</sup>

There appears to be no doubt that the corn-livestock system prevalent in Illinois was more profitable in the long run than cereal production. Not only had it replaced grain, as areas matured, but over-reliance on corn and wheat exposed the plains farmer to greater uncertainties of the market, effects of adverse weather, and abuses of middlemen. In the general trend of falling prices for farm commodities which followed the panic of 1873 and continued for a quarter of a century, wheat and corn prices fluctuated more violently and declined more and with greater rapidity than livestock and dairy products.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the typical grain farmer was more affected by high railroad rates. While it is true that after 1887 average freight rates declined faster than prices of farm produce, there was validity to the claim that it took one bushel of grain to transport another to market. Rates on livestock, percentage wise, were not as high,<sup>17</sup> and because the Kansas farmer lived farther from markets and shipped over roads which were more monopolistic due to lack of competition, he was more abused. In addition, the grain trade was burdened by an array of middlemen, a group that was less noticeable in livestock sales. Elevator operators, besides being

<sup>14</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook*, 1921 (Washington, 1922), pp. 87-93, 96; *ibid.*, 1922, p. 315.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 92-93, 95-96, 100-101, 103-104; U.S. *Eleventh Census: Abstract*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>16</sup> Louis B. Schmidt, "The Westward Movement of the Wheat Growing Industry in the United States," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XVIII (July, 1920), 396-412; United States Department of Agriculture, *Statistical Bulletin* 15 (Washington, 1927), pp. 183, 199-200.

<sup>17</sup> Fred A. Shannon, *The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture, 1860-1897* (Vol. V of *The Economic History of the United States*, Henry David and others, eds., Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., New York, 1945), pp. 295, 298; *Western Rural*, XVII (March 8, 1879), 73.



monopolistic, often undergraded the farmer's wheat, thereby depriving him of a just price. Trading in futures, if not actually harmful to farmers, was considered to be so. Added to this was the grain farmer's habit, usually enforced by necessity, of selling his produce at harvest time, thereby flooding the market and reducing the price received to a figure far below the average for the year.

Finally, the great plains farmer was forced to contend with adverse nature. Although the chernozem and prairie soils of the eastern two-thirds of Kansas and Nebraska were as fertile as those in the northern two-thirds of Illinois and were more fertile than the grey-brown podzolic or forest soils of the southern portion of the state,<sup>18</sup> the average crop yields were considerably lower than in Illinois. The lower production in the plains states was due in part to the lower percentage of improved land, but the primary reason, especially after 1886, was the lack of sufficient rainfall. During the next ten years, when the agrarian movement was at its height, the average annual precipitation in Kansas was twenty-six inches compared to thirty-six in Illinois. Nebraska suffered even more as her average was twenty-three, and in 1890, 1893, and 1894 it fell below twenty inches, the absolute minimum for the growing of crops by normal methods.<sup>19</sup>

Bad weather, less improved land, and little livestock reduced the value of the average Kansas or Nebraska farmer's productions. In 1889 the average Illinois farm, although roughly one-third smaller, produced an estimated \$768 worth of goods as compared to only \$571 and \$588 in the two states bordering on the Missouri.<sup>20</sup> When heavier interest charges, higher taxes, and greater extractions of middlemen and railroads are deducted, the economic differences between Illinois and its western competitors are even more apparent.

While the Illinois farmer avoided the worst effects of frontier speculation, excessive grain farming, and adverse weather conditions, there were marked differences within the state which largely explain the rise and relative strength of agrarian discontent and of farm organizations. For purposes of illustration, the state may be divided into three general areas.<sup>21</sup> Roughly, a line drawn east and west from

<sup>18</sup> Shannon, *Farmer's Last Frontier*, pp. 12-18.

<sup>19</sup> "Fluctuations in Crops and Weather, 1866-1948," United States Department of Agriculture, *Statistical Bulletin* 101 (Washington, 1951), pp. 40-41, 51-52, 54-55, 108, 109.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 92-93, 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> See Fig. 1.



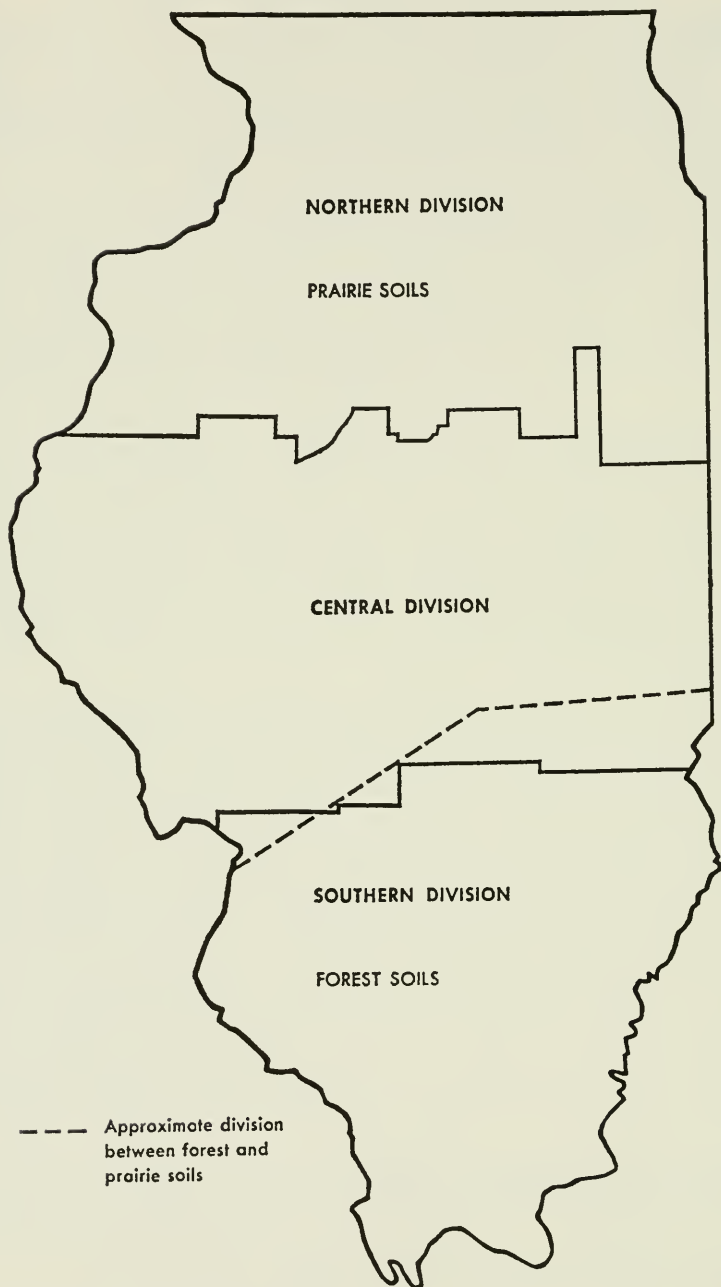


FIG. 1. Map showing major divisions in Illinois.

Peoria divides the northern and central districts while a line extending eastward from Alton separates the central and southern areas. Greater urbanization, better and more balanced farming systems, and good soils protected the northern Illinois farmer from the dangers of the period. In central Illinois, excellent soils did not always offset the disadvantages of extensive grain farming. Poor soil, heavy reliance on cereal production, and general backwardness gave southern Illinois the weakest economy in the state.

An obvious distinction between the three districts was the relative degree of urbanization. Although farmers complained bitterly when cities attracted their sons and daughters, the presence of urban areas increased the value of surrounding land by providing markets for dairy products and garden truck and by giving land a considerable speculative value, even in depression periods. At the same time, cities reduced agrarian discontent by absorbing some of the surplus population.<sup>22</sup> Farmers in the northern district benefited from the advantages of urbanization. Containing over 56 per cent of the total population in the state, the northern district included not only Chicago, which alone had almost a quarter of the total, but also 13 other cities of at least 8,000 people. In all, 61 per cent of the persons in the northern district lived in urban areas. The central zone had 26 per cent of the total population, but only 12 per cent lived in the district's six cities of at least 8,000 people. The southern district, which included only four communities classed as cities, was even more rural than the central division. The area included only 18 per cent of the state's population and 93 per cent lived on farms or in rural towns.<sup>23</sup>

A second clear distinction between the districts existed in the types of soils and their relative productivity. The soils of the state have been divided into a number of major groups on the basis of scientific criteria, but, for purposes of simplicity, they may be further classified in three general types: dark colored or prairie, light colored or forest, and sandy soils. Only small areas of the latter exist in Illinois. The area of the dark soils approximates the extent of the original prairies while the region of the light soils corresponds to the woodlands. Roughly, the prairie soils occupy the portion of the state north of a line extending from East St. Louis to Shelbyville, then east to the northern boundary of Clark County

<sup>22</sup> Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Sixth Biennial Report* (Springfield, 1891), p. 272.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. *Eleventh Census: Abstract*, pp. 16-17, 34-37.

while the forest soils are found south of this line.<sup>24</sup> With the exception of the northwest half of Madison County, the entire southern division is situated in the forest land area.

The dark soils of northern and central Illinois are more productive than the light soils of the southern part of the state. Containing more organic matter, phosphorus, and nitrogen, the dark soils need less limestone to correct acidity and are more responsive to treatment and drainage than those farther south. The light soils are not only lacking in natural fertility, but they are strongly acid and are handicapped by a layer of subsoil known as claypan which prevents natural drainage, reduces absorption, restricts the rise of subsurface water during droughts, and forces crops to develop shallow root systems.<sup>25</sup> The climate of Illinois is uniformly favorable to agriculture, insofar as average precipitation and length of growing season are concerned, but three- to six-week droughts are common during summers. They are much more critical in southern Illinois, due to the distinctive subsoil, and crops there suffer if rain does not fall every ten to fifteen days.<sup>26</sup>

The relative fertility and productivity of the soils in the state were indicated by the average yields of the basic crops as well as in the selling price of the land. While the northern and central divisions of the state produced thirty-one and thirty-three bushels of corn an acre during 1880-96, the southern district produced a third less, and the yields of both wheat and oats were lower by about the same percentage.<sup>27</sup> The value of farm land followed similar patterns. In 1887 the average price for farm land in Illinois was \$32.87 an acre. Of the forty-two counties having values above the state average, twenty-seven were located in the northern division, sixteen were found in the central district, and only two, Madison and St. Clair, were in southern Illinois. Similarly, thirty-two of the fifty-seven counties having land values below the state average were in the

<sup>24</sup> R. C. Ross and H. M. C. Case, "Types of Farming in Illinois," University of Illinois, Agricultural Experiment Station, *Bulletin* 601 (Urbana, 1956), pp. 8-11; Charles L. Stewart, *Land Tenure in the United States with Special Reference to Illinois* (University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Urbana, 1916), pp. 31-32, see Fig. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Shannon, *Farmer's Last Frontier*, pp. 12-18; Ross and Case, "Types of Farming," p. 11; A. J. Cross and J. E. Wills, "Organization and Operation of Farms in the Claypan Area of Southern Illinois with Special Reference to Wayne County," University of Illinois, Agricultural Experiment Station, *Bulletin* 579 (Urbana, 1954), pp. 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Ross and Case, "Types of Farming," pp. 11-12, 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> These conclusions and figures are based on an analysis of Illinois State Board of Agriculture, *Circulars*, 116-175 (Springfield, 1884-97).

southern portion of the state, nineteen were in the central division, and only six were found in northern Illinois.<sup>28</sup>

In comparison with Kansas and Nebraska, Illinois by 1880 possessed a diversified agrarian economy which reduced discontent within the state. With almost two-thirds of the state located in the corn-livestock belt, heavy production of cereals combined with large numbers of livestock to give the average farmer more protection against price declines and other adversities. Among the field crops, corn was the leader in terms of acreage and value, but in terms of rate of growth, it was overshadowed by oats which became the second-ranking crop by 1889. During the twenty-five years after 1875, wheat was the only major crop suffering a decline in acreage. Meanwhile, the percentage of all land in hay increased gradually so that the crop maintained its position as the third most important field product. Heavy corn, oats, and hay production led to a rapid increase in the number of livestock on Illinois farms. During the quarter of a century after 1875, the number of hogs and dairy cattle in the state rose 20 per cent and beef cattle doubled. Sheep was the only type of livestock to decrease in importance during the period.<sup>29</sup>

Within the state, however, differences in types of farming existed which contributed to the formation of discontent. In general, the northern portion possessed a more intensive and diversified economy which allowed the average farmer a larger income on his investment and provided him with a relatively high degree of economic stability. Containing 34 per cent of the farms in the state, the northern district produced 44 per cent of the livestock and basic field crops, including corn, oats, hay, and wheat. During the years 1880-96 the region had 63 per cent of the dairy cows as well as 45 per cent of the hogs and over half of the beef cattle in Illinois. Reflecting the emphasis on livestock, the northern district raised over half of the hay and oats and 45 per cent of the corn.

The central division contained 38 per cent of the farms and produced 36 per cent of the livestock and basic field crops, but it had less than a third as many dairy cows as the northern zone and only seven-tenths as many beef cattle. Farmers there relied on grain, much of which was sold off the farm, and other types of livestock. Over

<sup>28</sup> Illinois State Board of Labor Statistics, *Sixth Biennial Report*, pp. 263, 268-269, 272.

<sup>29</sup> "Illinois Agricultural Statistics," Illinois Department of Agriculture, Co-operative Crop Reporting Service, *Circular 445* (Springfield, 1949), pp. 15, 19, 24-25, 49, 81, 86, 91-92, 154.

40 per cent of the corn, hogs, and sheep were produced in the area. In contrast to the northern division, which contained only 7 per cent of the wheat acreage in the state, the central district had 46 per cent of the total. It also grew 30 per cent of the total oats crop.

The southern division, which included 28 per cent of the farms in Illinois, was primarily a grain-producing area. The region had 20 per cent of the livestock and basic field crops during the years 1880-96, but it included less than 15 per cent of the beef cattle, dairy cows, and hogs. Sheep were somewhat more important as the area contained 26 per cent of the total. Wheat was the major crop. Occupying almost as much land as oats and corn combined, the wheat acreage amounted to 48 per cent of the state's total. Only 14 per cent of the total corn and oats acreage was located in the southern district which included also 17 per cent of the total hay acreage.<sup>30</sup> Some southern Illinois farmers were beginning to devote attention to the production of garden truck and fruit. As early as 1871, peaches in commercial quantity were produced in Union County and apple orchards were important throughout southern Illinois. However, the market value of such agriculture was relatively slight. In 1889 the proceeds of garden truck and fruit was less than 1 per cent of the estimated total value of all farm produce.<sup>31</sup>

Southern Illinois farmers were further handicapped by a failure or an inability to adopt improved farming techniques. The rapid expansion of grain production and the improvement of livestock in the states to the west convinced many Illinois farmers not only of the need for more diversification but also indicated the desirability of raising still better livestock. The result was the introduction of purebred stock. As early as 1870, an Illinois Swine Breeders' Association was in existence, and by 1880 Illinois had nearly 60 per cent of the purebred hog raisers in the nation while there was considerable interest in purebred beef and dairy cattle and horses. But the better breeds of livestock were concentrated in the northern and central portions of the state.<sup>32</sup> The southern district remained more indifferent to progress, and while the typical southern Illinois

<sup>30</sup> See U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 204-206, for numbers of farms in the three districts. The percentages of state totals produced or maintained on farms have been compiled from Illinois State Board of Agriculture, *Circulars* 70-175 (Springfield, 1880-97).

<sup>31</sup> *Ottawa Republican*, August 3, 1871, p. 4; U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 204, 499.

<sup>32</sup> George H. Newlove, "Economic History of Illinois Agriculture" (Unpublished thesis in the University of Illinois Library, Urbana), pp. 87-92; *Illinois State Register*, January 3, 1870, p. 4.



farmer was not the "part hunter, part farmer, [and] largely loafer . . ." described in a *Chicago Tribune* account, he was more backward than his northern or central Illinois contemporary. The *Prairie Farmer* advertised four-moldboard gang plows, but the walking plow remained the favorite tool of the southern Illinois farmer. Lower wages for farm labor, fewer improvements such as adequate barns and other outbuildings, and an overwhelming majority of the work cattle in the state testified to the general backwardness of the area.<sup>33</sup>

The effect of soils, climate, size of farms, diversification, and general backwardness was shown by the estimated value of farm productions in each district. The average farm in the northern division in 1889 produced \$965 worth of farm commodities as compared to \$823 in the central and only \$470 in the southern zone. Northern and central Illinois farms tended to be larger, but when these figures are reduced to the average value of productions an acre, the differences are still striking. While the average acre in the northern part of the state produced \$7.15 worth of goods in 1889, the average acre in the central and southern zones contributed only \$6.13 and \$4.47 in farm produce.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to urbanization, soils, and diversification, other factors, including mortgage indebtedness, taxation, and tenant farming, influenced conditions in the districts. Between 1870 and 1887 the number and value of mortgages on lands and the number of acres covered increased rapidly.<sup>35</sup> They were larger and more common, both in absolute numbers and in total acreage covered, in the northern two-thirds of the state, but those in the southern one-third were more burdensome. Much of the indebtedness of the northern and central parts of the state was due to borrowing for investment in feeder cattle or for permanent improvements, such as tiling. Of the twenty-one counties having the highest debt in 1887, twelve were located in the drainage district of east-central Illinois and were among the most productive in the state.<sup>36</sup> In many cases, therefore, a portion of the indebtedness was actually an indication of prosperity, since a part of the debt was contracted in the expectation of greater returns.

<sup>33</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 1884, p. 6; Illinois State Board of Agriculture, *Circular* 172, pp. 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 204-206.

<sup>35</sup> Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Fifth Biennial Report*, pp. lxvi, lxxx, cxvi-cxvii.

<sup>36</sup> *National Economist*, I (July 27, 1889), 295; *Prairie Farmer*, LX (July 28, 1888), 487.

But even indebtedness incurred for improvements or investments came to be a burden as prices of farm produce fell, and it created more distress in central and southern Illinois where grain production for the market was most important. Other factors indicated that private indebtedness was most acute in the southern part of the state. In 1887, 18 per cent of the mortgage loans contracted in southern Illinois were for deferred payments, indicating extreme distress, as compared to only 10 and 13 per cent in northern and central Illinois. Similarly, statistics of foreclosures in 1887 show that hardship was more acute in southern Illinois. Over 50 per cent of the state's total occurred there, and the increase in numbers over that of 1880 was a startling 86 per cent. Finally, the interest rates were higher and the mortgages were for a shorter period in southern Illinois, suggesting the greater risks involved.<sup>37</sup>

Public debts and resultant tax burdens varied considerably within the state, but the greatest differences were among individual counties rather than between divisions. Between 1880 and 1890 the county debt was reduced almost a fourth, and by the latter date fifty counties had no floating debts. Counties with large towns or cities had larger indebtedness, but others, such as Macoupin and Pike, suffered from high debts and taxes because of the construction of extravagant court houses or aid given to railroads. Still, in 1890 the per capita debt was highest in the central division and the per capita ad valorem taxation was especially heavy in that region.<sup>38</sup>

Tenant farming also affected the income of Illinois farmers. Although the practice of renting first became prominent in Illinois during the decade prior to the Civil War, only after 1870 did it become common. By 1880, 31 per cent of the farms in the state were operated by nonowners, and ten years later the percentage was 34.<sup>39</sup> Tenancy was more common in the northern and central regions than farther south, and it was especially a burden in central Illinois, where cash rents were common. During the 1880's, owners steadily raised both cash and share rents. By March, 1892, share rents in east-central Illinois had increased from the traditional one-third or two-fifths to one-half of the crop, and a year later tenant farmers

<sup>37</sup> Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Fifth Biennial Report*, pp. lx-lxi, cxv-cxvii; *ibid.*, *Sixth Biennial Report*, pp. 206-240.

<sup>38</sup> Chester M. Destler, "Agricultural Readjustment and Agrarian Unrest in Illinois, 1880-1896," *Agricultural History*, XXI (April, 1947), 113; U.S. *Eleventh Census: Wealth, Debt, and Taxation*, Part I, pp. 253-254; *ibid.*, Part II, pp. 68-70.

<sup>39</sup> Ross and Case, "Types of Farming," p. 19; Stewart, *Land Tenure*, pp. 44-45.

in Macon County paid as much as \$8.00 cash an acre, or almost double earlier rates.<sup>40</sup> Such extractions placed a heavy burden on central Illinois tenants, even those renting the best land in the state.

If rural conditions in Illinois were not as desperate as in the plains states, many farmers were unaware of their good fortune. Although an urban reporter in 1890 informed Illinois farmers that they were "encouraged, industrious, and happy," many who expressed themselves displayed a more critical tone. Even some agrarian spokesmen who were content attributed their relative good fortune to a "kind and generous Providence" and denounced the "mad policy" of the government which endangered their security.<sup>41</sup> In spite of an abundance of good crops and favorable weather, a leading farm journal reported that money was scarce, depression was evident, and many farmers were being forced to leave their land. An exodus from the state, which had abated after 1876, began anew by 1884 and, combined with an increasing number of land sales, suggested that the discontent expressed by farmers and journalistic spokesmen had considerable validity.<sup>42</sup>

Railroads, the old enemy of the farmer, still aroused his ire. Although rates had declined since the early 1870's, farmers believed that high dividends, averaging 9 per cent, watered stock, and managerial extravagance still resulted in excessive charges. While some rural spokesmen wondered how railroad profits could increase while the income of shippers was steadily falling, most farmers limited their concern to the immediate matter of rates. As late as 1880, the average charge for transporting a bushel of wheat from Chicago to New York was twenty cents while it cost eighty-six cents, or roughly 10 per cent of the total value, to ship a 200-pound hog over the same route. But the average rate was far from what the farmer paid. Various forms of discrimination, such as the long and short haul, were common, and rates fluctuated mysteriously, sometimes doubling in winter when the water route to the East was closed.<sup>43</sup>

The Illinois State Board of Railroad and Warehouse Commissioners, which was established in 1871 and given additional power

<sup>40</sup> U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 134-136; Destler, "Agricultural Readjustment," p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, November 29, 1880, p. 5; *Prairie Farmer*, LI (April 24, 1880), 129.

<sup>42</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIV (January 9, 1886), 25; *Chicago Tribune*, July 30, 1880, p. 4, February 29, 1884, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, December 6, 1879, p. 4; *Farmers' Voice*, II (February 23, 1889), 7; United States Department of Agriculture, *Yearbook*, 1898, pp. 725-726.

in 1873 to establish a schedule of rates and to prevent rebates and other discriminations, pacified some shippers as it instituted suits against the roads and adjusted other complaints. But since the burden of proof lay with the shipper, the roads in many cases charged what the traffic would bear and otherwise defied the law.<sup>44</sup> In 1879 it cost from ten to twelve cents a bushel to ship grain from Rock Falls to Chicago, a distance of 110 miles, while ten years later, farmers claimed that rates on livestock were from \$2.00 to \$9.00 a car above the legal rate. In another example of place discrimination, the Eastern Illinois Railroad charged the same amount for hauling lumber from Chicago to Rossville as it did from Chicago to East St. Louis, although it was only one-third as far. Further, the roads often gave poor service, weighed commodities incorrectly, co-operated with monopolistic elevators, and outraged farmers by refusing to put up fences along the tracks or to pay damages.<sup>45</sup>

The failure of the roads to give general satisfaction led to protest meetings and prompted the belief that the state board was under the domination of the railroad interests. Farmers suspected that free passes were used to influence both members of the board and state legislators. The suspicion seemed to be confirmed in 1885 when the Illinois Central provided ten Pullman cars to transport a group of politicians to the World Exposition in New Orleans. By 1888 the state board was becoming more conservative and obviously favored the roads. When farmers continued to be extremely critical, the board said that many complaints were made in "pure spite" or as a means to threaten a road. Claiming that relations between companies and shippers were amiable, the board stated that extortion and "unjust" discriminations had been eliminated but admitted that rates, while they were more uniform, were about where they would have been fixed by "free competition."<sup>46</sup>

Trusts, monopolies, and middlemen were as distasteful to Illinois farmers as elsewhere, even if conditions did reduce their abilities to abuse the agricultural groups. Spokesmen recognized that trusts

<sup>44</sup> Illinois Railroad and Warehouse Commission, *Tenth Annual Report* (Springfield, 1881), pp. 24-41; *Prairie Farmer*, LI (February 7, 1880), 41; *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 1890, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Western Rural*, XVII (March 29, 1879), 101; *Farmers' Review*, XXII (July 8, 1891), 427.

<sup>46</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LI (February 7, 1880), 41; *Chicago Tribune*, May 27, 1885, p. 2; Illinois Railroad and Warehouse Commission, *Eighteenth Annual Report*, p. 12; *ibid.*, *Nineteenth Annual Report*, p. xix.



were being formed in almost every industry, and they were not unaware of their effects on the people. The establishment of a sugar pool in 1881, which advanced the price to the consumer by two and three cents a pound, produced a typical outburst.<sup>47</sup> A combination among Chicago coal dealers in 1886, by which the price was arbitrarily raised twenty-five cents a ton, received attention, while the establishment of a harvester syndicate in 1890 and the discovery of a trust in binder twine the previous year led to determined farmer opposition. The existence of a school book trust caused many to think that the free school system was a farce and resulted in the widespread demand for state publication at cost. Farmers especially disliked local monopolies, such as those created by grain buyers who banded together, depressed the price, and resorted to incorrect weighing of the farmers' produce. Similar was their attitude toward terminal elevator operators in Chicago who were habitually accused of undergrading wheat. To make matters worse, it was commonly believed that state grain inspectors, who were political appointees, were either dishonest or ignorant or both.<sup>48</sup>

While grain farmers found cause for grievances in the buyers' methods of handling their grain, the livestock growers directed their anger toward the stockyards. The Union Stockyards in Chicago was especially disliked as the farmer believed that daily yardage costs of twenty-five cents on cattle, eight cents on hogs, and five cents on sheep were excessive. Greater antagonism was aroused, however, when charges for feed consumed in the yards exceeded the market price by over 100 per cent. Finally, farmers believed that handlers in the yards deliberately damaged animals so that they would not bring full market price.<sup>49</sup>

Machinery stores, country merchants, and various types of traveling salesmen also attracted the attention of Illinois farmers. Most implement manufacturers refused to sell their goods except through an agent or country dealer who added from 25 to 30 per cent to the price without performing any needed service. Country merchants, although burdened themselves, were suspected of making excessive profits on their investment. The drummers who served as links

<sup>47</sup> *Ogle County Democrat*, July 21, 1881, p. 2; *Prairie Farmer*, LX (April 14, 1888), 235.

<sup>48</sup> *National Economist*, IV (November 22, 1890), 161; *Western Rural*, XXIV (December 4, 1886), 795; *Chicago Tribune*, March 14, 1887, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1, 1890, p. 10; *Western Rural*, XVII (September 27, 1879), 308.

between the wholesalers and the country merchants were considered to be simply economic parasites whose existence was an additional burden on the farmer. Only slightly worse were the itinerant swindlers, such as seed salesmen and lightning rod agents, who preyed on the rural districts.<sup>50</sup>

But the greatest danger from monopolies and trusts and their lesser followers arose not from higher prices for necessities or reduced prices for farm products but from their influence in government. Being well aware that concentrations of wealth played some role in the passage of legislation, farmers believed that business interests used money secured by extortion to influence legislatures and Congress. Since monopolies, in effect, legislated for themselves, the result was the enactment of class laws, such as the tariff and the contraction of the currency, which abused those elements of society unable to protect themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Among Illinois farmers, there was a diversity of opinion concerning the tariff. Some blindly accepted the arguments of advocates, but probably a majority believed that while protection had a patriotic beginning, its usefulness was at an end. When as conservative a paper as the *Chicago Tribune* could announce that American-made farm implements sold for less abroad than they did at home, most farmers were convinced that the free trade argument had some validity.<sup>52</sup> Many could see little difference between the parties in their stands on the issue and believed that only sham battles were waged over it. The debate on the McKinley bill of 1890 solidified the rural districts in opposition, and the abrupt increase in retail prices of hardware, shoes, and other necessities which followed the passage of the bill only intensified the outcry.<sup>53</sup>

There was little difference of opinion concerning the effects of the contraction of the currency although some farmers recognized it as only a manifestation of the probusiness inclinations of the government. But as hard times became more acute in the late 1880's, the demand for an increase in the circulating currency by one means or the other became more pronounced. By the early years of the next decade, leading agricultural spokesmen claimed that not only was the financial question the most important problem facing

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX (December 5, 1891), 779.

<sup>51</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (June 1, 1889), 345; *Centralia Daily Sentinel*, January 26, 1887, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 11, 1888, p. 1, August 15, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, II (May 12, 1889), 4; *White Hall Register*, October 17, 1890, p. 2.

the farmers, but that its correction was necessary before other reforms could be attempted.<sup>54</sup>

A more basic and deep-seated grievance was caused by the feeling among farmers that they were no longer represented in legislative halls. Although over half of the population in 1880 lived in rural districts, only 14 of the 369 members of the Senate and the House of Representatives claimed to be farmers. Instead, lawyers were in an overwhelming majority. In the Illinois state legislature, the legal profession was also well represented, while farmers believed that their own influence was further reduced by the representatives from Chicago, who not only were of the "lowest type," but who also stood steadfast in opposition to agricultural interests.<sup>55</sup> According to farmers, legislatures consisting of such groups indulged in reckless appropriations, waste, and needlessly complex laws which corrected no evils but resulted in lengthy and costly litigation. Political appointees, who filled the innumerable positions in generally useless agencies, represented the farmer even less. Although agrarian groups demanded a cabinet position for agriculture, at least one rural skeptic questioned whether the official appointed would know "whether pumpkins [grew] on trees or under the ground."<sup>56</sup>

Nowhere was the failure to elect farmers to office more apparent than in the matter of taxation. The Illinois tax system was denounced since farmers maintained that they paid over 75 per cent of the state taxes, while city folk avoided paying their share. Since rural property was in plain sight while much of that owned by city people could be concealed, a large part of the city property escaped assessment.<sup>57</sup> Stocks, bonds, safes, and watches seemed to be hard to find in Chicago and even businesses, buildings, and railroads were drastically underassessed. Moreover, local tax officials habitually failed to recognize the expansion of urban property, and in 1891 the assessors of Chicago could find property valued at only \$1,500,000 more than in the previous year although the *Chicago Tribune* reported that new buildings alone were worth \$40,000,000.<sup>58</sup> The

<sup>54</sup> *Western Rural*, XVII (May 17, 1879), 153; *Progressive Farmer*, V (June 2, 1892), 8; Herman E. Taubeneck, *The Condition of the American Farmer* (The Schulte Publishing Company, Chicago, 1896), pp. 41-42, 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LI (January 31, 1880), 33; *Farmer and Fruit Grower*, April 26, 1882, p. 2; *Western Rural*, XXIII (January 3, 1885), 8.

<sup>56</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LI (February 21, 1880), 60; *Farmers' Voice*, II (November 23, 1889), 10.

<sup>57</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, April 29, 1890, p. 9; *Industrial Struggle: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and Its Work* (Western Rural, Chicago, 1893), p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Eighth Biennial Report*, p. 264; *Illinois State Register*, July 21, 1891, p. 4.

State Board of Equalization, which was established in 1867 to adjust county assessment totals and given additional power in 1872 to assess railroad property and the capital stock of corporations, failed to correct the obvious abuses. Instead, farmers believed that it served only as a shield for business interests.<sup>59</sup>

Grievances arising from railroad practices, trusts, middlemen, class legislation, and corrupt politicians would have been less sharp had they not been accompanied by falling prices for farm commodities after 1881. Moreover, the decline in the value of farm productions necessary to the forceful expression of agrarian distress affected farmers in Illinois differently. Because cereals underwent the greatest relative decline in price, the southern and central portions of the state were especially harmed. From a peak price of \$1.22 a bushel in 1881, wheat fell steadily to a low of 45 cents in 1894. Corn and oats suffered similar reductions in value, falling from prices of 58 and 43 cents in 1881 to 18 and 15 cents in 1896.<sup>60</sup> Farmers commonly believed, and their spokesmen repeatedly emphasized, that these commodities were being produced at a loss. A prominent southern Illinois leader claimed that wheat could not be grown profitably at less than \$1.00 a bushel or corn at 50 cents a bushel. In only one year between 1880 and 1896 were either of these figures reached.<sup>61</sup> The Illinois State Board of Agriculture further substantiated the plight of the grain farmer by calculating that it cost \$9.81 an acre to produce wheat and \$8.94 to raise corn. Proceeding from such figures, the agency showed that the farmers of the state lost \$16,000,000 on their wheat, corn, and oats crops during the seventeen years after 1879.<sup>62</sup>

It appears that the average farmer was better paid for raising cattle, hogs, and sheep, thereby giving northern and some central Illinois operators protection against the evils of the period. Although the farmer complained bitterly about the price of livestock as well as grain, the price of farm animals did not decline as rapidly or, in relation to earlier prices, as far as those of cereals. Cattle values

<sup>59</sup> I. M. Labovitz, "The Illinois Revenue System, 1818-1936," Illinois Tax Commission, *Special Report* 4 (Springfield, 1936), p. 15; *Farmers' Voice*, II (January 26, 1889), 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1890, p. 4; "Illinois Agricultural Statistics," pp. 15, 19, 25.

<sup>61</sup> Taubeneck, *American Farmer*, pp. 30-31, quoting a letter from John P. Stelle.

<sup>62</sup> Illinois State Board of Agriculture, *Circular* 187, p. 5; *ibid.*, *Circular* 190, pp. 4, 6.



showed a steady rise from 1879 to 1885, followed by a slump which lasted until 1892. The price of hogs between 1875 and 1896 followed a rhythmic pattern as peaks were reached in 1876, 1883, 1889, and 1893. Although there was a slight recession during the years from 1887 to 1891, the general trend was upward. The production of hogs in the state, however, was severely handicapped by outbreaks of cholera which convinced many farmers that the risks involved exceeded the prospects of profits. Sheep, although relatively unimportant on Illinois farms, increased in value from 1879 to 1893, but suffered a severe decline during the next two years.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, other articles produced by farmers fell drastically in price. For example, farmers claimed that butter did not pay for the feed consumed in its production while garden truck and fruit brought sharply reduced prices or could not be sold at all, due to growing competition from newly-developed areas in Michigan and elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>

Low prices, resulting from basic underconsumption, abuses of middlemen, trusts, and railroads, inequalities in taxation, and corrupt politicians, combined with the apparent failure of the remainder of society to recognize the needs of agriculture, created distress and agrarian discontent in Illinois as it did in the western states. The basic difference was one of degree. But while the average Illinois farmer was in a better position than his western contemporary, there were many who were equally oppressed. The operator in southern Illinois, in many cases, suffered more than the average farmer in Kansas or Nebraska. Nor did the grain producer of central Illinois escape the hardship that came with ruinous prices for wheat and corn. Further, while many in northern and central Illinois enjoyed relative prosperity, others who were unable to secure capital for improvement or expansion suffered from the same conditions that burdened farmers elsewhere. As prices of farm commodities continued their downward plunge, those farmers burdened by debts, high rents, or poor land were especially harmed. Even where the pangs of economic distress were not so sharp, others were willing to join agrarian organizations for educational, social, and cooperative advantages where proper leadership appeared.

<sup>63</sup> "Illinois Agricultural Statistics," pp. 15, 19, 24-25, 81, 86, 91-92.

<sup>64</sup> *Western Rural*, XXII (July 5, 1884), 421; *ibid.*, XXIV (April 24, 1886), 259; Illinois State Board of Agriculture, *Circular* 149, pp. 35-36.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Milton George and the National Farmers' Alliance

The first of the new farm orders to appear in Illinois after the decline of the Patrons of Husbandry was the National Farmers' Alliance. Spreading throughout the Middle West, it failed to secure the widespread support in Illinois that it received in the states beyond the Mississippi, but it awakened the desire for agrarian unity and gave the farmers' movement in Illinois its dominating philosophy. Further, the objectives of the early National Alliance came to be the goals of all farm orders existing in the state after 1880.

Milton George, who established the National Farmers' Alliance and dominated its national body for seven years, was in an ideological sense the founder of the entire agrarian movement in Illinois. The eldest son of a pioneer Scotch Quaker family, George was born near Hillsboro, Ohio, in 1833. Six years later, his father, deciding opportunities were greater on the frontier, joined the general migratory trend westward and settled on a 235-acre tract near Farmington in central Illinois. There, George grew to manhood, acquired the basic elements of an education, settled down to farming, and married the daughter of a prosperous merchant. During the Civil War decade, he successfully combined farming with school teaching so that, in 1871, he was able to purchase a valuable 300-acre farm in Cook County, Illinois. The following year, he began a career in agricultural journalism when he secured a position as assistant editor of a Chicago farm magazine entitled the *Western Rural and Family Farm Paper*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>David W. Wood, *Chicago and Its Distinguished Citizens* (Milton George and Company, Chicago, 1881), pp. 291-292; James W. Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line* (Chicago, 1924), pp. 24, 60-61; *History of Fulton County, Illinois* (Charles G. Chapman and Company, Peoria, Illinois, 1879), pp. 786-787; *Western Rural*, XXX (June 11, 1892), 378. Official evidence on his location and early interests is in Fulton County Tax Books and in United States Census, Manuscript Schedules for Farmington Township, Fulton County, for 1860 (Microfilm copy, Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield).

Before the complete destruction of its plant in the great Chicago fire of 1871, the *Western Rural* had established a reputation as a successful farm paper. By 1868 it claimed a greater circulation than its principal rival, the *Prairie Farmer*, and the competition was so strong that the latter paper changed its format in January, 1869, to correspond to that of the *Western Rural*. Following the fire, however, the publisher of the *Western Rural*, Horatio N. F. Lewis, suffered financial reverses which were to result in a transfer of control of the paper to George. Lewis managed to obtain from George a loan of approximately \$17,000, and in 1876, when the paper was worth no more than \$10,000, George assumed control in an attempt to recover his investment.<sup>2</sup>

It was obvious to the new owner that the paper needed rejuvenation and, confident of his own abilities, George decided to manage it himself. In the conduct of the paper, he instituted several definite policies. He demanded absolute honesty in advertisements, subscribers were treated with all possible courtesy, and the editorial policy was never influenced by outside forces. One of his first acts was the hiring of an editorial writer named David W. Wood. A farm leader with an established reputation, Wood's writing ability and wide knowledge contributed much to the pages of the *Western Rural*; he was soon in constant demand as a speaker, and during the early years of the alliance movement, he was a prominent figure in it.<sup>3</sup>

Milton George's effort to protect his investment was secondary to his desire to use his paper for the improvement of agriculture's position in an industrial society. In studying the causes of agrarian distress, he gradually evolved views which later became the cornerstones of alliance and Populist thought. First, it was apparent to him that in a democracy, government should be controlled by the great mass of the people, rather than by the plutocrats, and that govern-

<sup>2</sup> Wood, *Chicago and Its Distinguished Citizens*, pp. 291-292; Franklin W. Scott, *Newspapers and Periodicals in Illinois, 1814-1879* (Lakeside Press, Chicago, 1910), p. 80; Richard Bardolph, *Agricultural Literature and the Early Illinois Farmer* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1948), pp. 95n, 103n; *Western Rural*, X (November 9, 1872), 729.

<sup>3</sup> David W. Wood, ed., *History of the Republican Party and Biographies of Its Supporters* (Lincoln Engraving and Publishing Company, Chicago, 1895), pp. 205-206. Wood continued as editor of the *Western Rural* until January 1, 1892. Three months later he purchased a share in the *Farmers' Voice* and thereafter became a bitter journalistic competitor. See *Farmers' Voice*, VI (March 26, 1892), 8. For evidence of George's honest handling of the *Western Rural*, see Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, pp. 24, 60-61; Wood, *Chicago and Its Distinguished Citizens*, pp. 292-293.

ment should use its power to protect those unable to protect themselves. Second, his philosophy was based on a never-changing belief in the innate value and wisdom of the farming class. He not only believed that land was the source of all wealth, but he thought that agriculture had given society its greatest leaders. Throughout history, he said, "the tiller of the soil has been the architect of the world's glory and the chief promoter of the world's prosperity."<sup>4</sup>

The relatively poor position in which agriculture found itself indicated to George that farmers were not receiving a just share of the benefits of the society to which they had contributed so generously. He thought the failure was largely due to a "strange apathy on the part of government toward the agricultural classes." Government on all levels was dominated by concentrations of wealth resulting from the unrestricted growth of monopolies, railroads, and other giant corporations. These organizations, with their great financial power, were able to corrupt legislatures and Congress so that class legislation was the result. George pointed to the tariff, contraction of the currency, and financial assistance to railroads as the most obvious examples of such legislation.<sup>5</sup>

Milton George consistently believed that the farmer could protect himself by exerting his political power. Since half the nation's voters lived on farms, he reasoned that if they exercised their rights, forgot senseless partisanship, and sent farmers instead of "partisan blow-hards" to legislatures and Congress, injustices would be corrected. However, George never called for the formation of a third party since he felt that such groups invariably attracted impractical idealists whose diverse objectives doomed the entire effort. Moreover, he considered it dangerous to tamper with the political loyalties of farmers. Instead, the agricultural groups should work through the machinery of existing parties and secure the nomination of men favorable to agrarian interests.<sup>6</sup>

If the farmer were to use his numerical strength to rejuvenate

<sup>4</sup> John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1931), pp. 405-406; Milton George, ed., *Western Rural Yearbook, a Cyclopedia of Reference* (Western Rural and Stockman, Chicago, 1886), p. 131; *Industrial Struggle*, p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32; Illinois Manual Training School, *Twentieth Annual Report* (Glenwood, Illinois, 1907), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Western Rural*, XVII (April 19, 1879), 124; *ibid.*, XXVIII (February 8, 1890), 88; *ibid.*, XXVI (July 14, 1888), 441; National Farmers' Alliance, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting*, 1891 (Des Moines, Iowa, 1891), pp. 11-13. George never favored the formation of a third party, refused to support Weaver in 1892, and openly advocated the election of McKinley in 1896.



politics, education was necessary. George was certain that agricultural groups, using their common sense, could grasp the great problems of the day if they were presented to them. But, according to the owner of the *Western Rural*, other farm journals devoted their attention to purely agricultural topics and ignored agrarian abuses, while metropolitan papers noticed the farmers only to ridicule them. Therefore, he resolved to use the journal as a means of informing the farmers and of rousing them from their apathy by exposing the injustices of the period.<sup>7</sup>

In the columns of the *Western Rural*, George gave considerable attention to such specific grievances as the adulteration of foods, mismanagement of stockyards, school book trusts, and insurance rates. In addition, he continually sought to educate farmers in such broad areas as the growth of monopolies in a multitude of commodities, the need for banking and currency reform, and the inequalities in the taxing system. However, George considered the malpractices of railroads to be the gravest issue facing farmers. He declared, "The most important problem before the American people today . . . is the question of subduing the arrogance of our railroad corporations and of reducing them to a recognition of allegiance to the power that created and sustains them."<sup>8</sup> Admitting that railroads were an absolute necessity, George was shrewd enough to see that they constituted a natural monopoly so he concluded that the transportation furnished was not a "mere article of commerce" and that it should not be controlled by a few men. In reality, since railroads were not a pure type of private property but were public highways, the federal government had every right to regulate them.<sup>9</sup>

The National Farmers' Alliance was an outgrowth of George's efforts to awaken farmers and legislators to the need for governmental regulation of the public carriers. In the late 1870's, he felt that if petitions bearing a sufficient number of signatures assailed Washington and the state legislatures, the desired control could be achieved. In the early months of 1879, after presenting a thorough study of the problem in the *Western Rural*, he printed thousands of petitions and distributed them to Granges, farmers' clubs, and individuals throughout the Middle West. The first petitions, which were

<sup>7</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *History of the Alliance Movement* (Chicago, 1882), pp. 1-2; George, *Western Rural Yearbook*, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (February 7, 1880), 44.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, XVII (November 8, 1879), 356; *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 7-8, 10-11, 15-16.

addressed to the state legislatures, outlined the abuses arising from railroad practices, pointed to the Supreme Court decision in *Munn v. Illinois*, and asked the state legislatures to appoint special committees with power to ascertain the true value of railroad property and to set rates based on the findings.<sup>10</sup>

Although George sent out petitions freely and David W. Wood spoke at innumerable farmers' meetings, the work progressed slowly, indicating that some type of organization was needed as a catalyst for the project.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, in November, 1879, George began urging farmers to organize "cheap transportation clubs" in which they could discuss the railroad problem and sign the petitions. To aid in their formation, he published a model constitution providing for the establishment of local groups which would meet once or twice a month. There was no central organization, and the only link between the proposed groups was that furnished by the *Western Rural*.<sup>12</sup>

When farmers were hesitant in organizing the groups and general response to the effort was unsatisfactory, George decided to establish a more formal organization having a wider appeal. Since he had been active in the Grange, the new society was modeled after the older one but differed in certain particulars to placate some of its critics. Many farmers objected to the Grange because of its secret features as well as its nonpartisanship and the expense connected with membership.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the new organization was nonsecret, it was openly political in the sense that members were urged to inform themselves and work through their parties, and it required the payment of only nominal fees and dues. The educational, co-operative, and social features of the Grange were included although they were less prominent than in the older organization. In fact, as George envisioned his new group, it would not compete with the Grange but would supplement it.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Western Rural*, XVII (January 25, 1879), 28; *ibid.*, XVII (September 13, 1879), 292; Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>11</sup> In 1881 George took petitions bearing over 200,000 signatures to Washington where he presented them to Representative Thomas A. Boyd of Illinois. *Western Rural*, XIX (February 19, 1881), 60; *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 3rd Sess., XI (Washington, 1881), 1565.

<sup>12</sup> George, *Western Rural Yearbook*, pp. 130-132; *Western Rural*, XVII (November 29, 1879), 380.

<sup>13</sup> Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, p. 62; *Industrial Struggle*, p. 33; Champaign County Grange, MSS Proceedings, June 19, July 3, 1877 (Illinois Historical Survey, Urbana).

<sup>14</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (September 18, 1880), 300.



Additional precedents for the group were drawn from earlier organizations. Although one contemporary writer traced the alliance movement to a settlers' league or alliance which was established in 1872 to resist railroad encroachments on the Osage lands in south-eastern Kansas, the first effective organization bearing the alliance name arose in New York State. In February, 1875, a group was created in North Chili, New York, to serve as a political arm of the Grange. Becoming a county organization known as the Western New York Farmers' Club, it called a state meeting at Rochester, March 21, 1877, where 300 delegates established the New York State Farmers' Alliance.<sup>15</sup> As the order developed, it became as much an urban shippers' league as it was a rural association, but its general objectives appealed especially to farmers.<sup>16</sup> At the time he was formulating plans for the Alliance, George claimed he was unfamiliar with the New York society, but the remarkable similarity of objectives suggests some knowledge of its operations. Moreover, when George issued a call for a general convention to establish the National Farmers' Alliance, he invited the New York group to send delegates.<sup>17</sup>

Early in 1880, George called on farmers to organize local alliances, but it was soon obvious that the generation of locals was not to be spontaneous. Although a brief constitution was published in the *Western Rural*, nothing was accomplished because no one could be induced to form the first local. Instead, correspondents urged George to take the initiative and create a model for them. In response he resolved to establish a local in the office of the *Western Rural* and set April 15, 1880, as the date for a meeting of interested persons.<sup>18</sup> Two weeks before the meeting, he published a constitution which continued to be used by locals throughout the life of the order. It provided for a membership of at least seven "practical and operative farmers," meeting at least once a month, and presided over by four officers elected for six-month terms. New members, who paid an

<sup>15</sup> Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, p. 35; Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 230-232; *Western Rural*, XVIII (November 20, 1880), 369; *The Cultivator and Country Gentleman*, XLII (April 12, 1877), 232.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, XLV (September 2, 1880), 568-569; *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1880, p. 7; *Directory of Directors in the City of New York* (The Audit Company of New York, New York, 1907), p. 643; Lee Benson, *Merchants, Farmers, and Railroads: Railroad Regulation and New York Politics* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1955), pp. 112-114.

<sup>17</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (July 31, 1880), 244.

<sup>18</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 3; *Industrial Struggle*, p. 33.

initiation fee of fifty cents, were admitted upon the recommendation of an "active" and the concurrence of two-thirds of the membership. The appeal of the club was enlarged by allowing participants to discuss any question of interest to farmers.<sup>19</sup>

Only one "practical and operative" farmer attended the meeting, but George, aided by two members of the *Western Rural* staff and three others whose connection with the realities of agriculture were vague, proceeded to create a pilot society. George was nominated for permanent president of the pioneer Cook County Alliance but declined the honor, later accepting the office of treasurer since he expected to support the association financially.<sup>20</sup> Among the other officers was James W. Wilson, business manager of the *Western Rural*, who became secretary of the model local. The group adopted, with only an enlarged statement of objectives, the constitution drafted before the meeting and under George's guidance approved a set of bylaws for the club. Membership was opened to women, and eighteen was established as the minimum age of participants. Meetings, which were to be held twice a month, were open, but nonmembers could be excluded by majority vote. George offered to allow the club to meet regularly in the office of the *Western Rural*, which served as the headquarters of the alliance movement for the next seven years.<sup>21</sup>

Until there was a sufficient number of local alliances to justify the establishment of a national body, the Cook County Alliance prepared instructions and issued charters to groups of farmers who organized themselves. There was no formal system of lecturers, and the movement was allowed to expand by its own momentum.<sup>22</sup> New bodies, however, were expected to organize under the constitution of the Cook County Alliance and to adopt bylaws not in conflict with it. The only charge was a twenty-five cent charter fee to cover cost of printing and mailing the charters.<sup>23</sup>

The first charter was issued to a group of farmers near Filly, Nebraska, who organized under the name of Monitor Alliance, No. 1, and three months after the establishment of the Cook County Al-

<sup>19</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (April 10, 1880), 117.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, XXX (May 7, 1892), 291; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (June 11, 1892), 4; Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, VI (April 23, 1892), 8; National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>22</sup> George, *Western Rural Yearbook*, pp. 139-140; *Western Rural*, XVIII (June 19, 1880), 212.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII (April 24, 1880), 132.

liance, George reported that his office mailed charters at the rate of ten a week to locals scattered through Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois.<sup>24</sup> By late August the growth of the order indicated that a national convention was practical, and Milton George, speaking for the Cook County Alliance, called a meeting to convene in Chicago on October 14, 1880, and assumed full responsibility for the gathering. All members of the Alliance, representatives of the Grange and other farmers' clubs, and individual farmers were invited to attend. Originally, Governor Shelby M. Cullom was expected, and governors of other states were invited to speak.<sup>25</sup>

On the appointed day, 623 delegates representing thirteen middle western and eastern states assembled for the meeting. Among those present were representatives from the Kentucky and Illinois State Granges, the New York State Farmers' Alliance, and the agricultural press. The day was spent in two distinct sessions. All the delegates participated in a preliminary transportation conference which, after listening to speeches by David W. Wood and others, drafted a statement outlining the indictment against railroads and adopted seven resolutions which included the demand for federal regulation of the carriers, praised the Grange for its work, and asked the farmers to refuse to support journals not in sympathy with them.<sup>26</sup>

Immediately following the adjournment of the transportation conference, about half of the delegates remained to form the National Farmers' Alliance. As in the case of the original association, Milton George and David W. Wood were the dominant personalities. Wood submitted and the convention adopted a constitution which was the framework of the organization until 1887. It provided for national, state, and local units, but made the National Alliance a delegate body with little real authority, established a board of officers elected for one-year terms at annual October meetings, and outlined, in general terms, the rules governing the association. Besides its officers, the National Alliance consisted of two delegates from each state body and one representative from each local in other

<sup>24</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 5; J. M. Thompson, "The Farmers' Alliance in Nebraska," Nebraska State Historical Society, *Proceedings and Collections*, 2nd Series, V (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1902), 199; *Western Rural*, XVIII (July 24, 1880), 236.

<sup>25</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 5; *Missouri Republican*, October 7, 1880, p. 7; *Western Rural*, XVIII (August 28, 1880), 276.

<sup>26</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1880, p. 7; *Western Rural*, XVIII (October 23, 1880), 340.

states. To compensate for the obvious inequalities in this arrangement, delegates from unorganized states could be required to vote as a unit. Delegates from other farm organizations were admitted to the deliberations of the National Alliance and were allowed to speak and vote on any question. The central body issued charters to state alliances and to locals in states having no official organization but did not specify in any detail the regulations governing either level of the Alliance.<sup>27</sup> Following the establishment of the national association, the newly-elected officers met in executive session to formalize relations between the central body and subordinate groups. They agreed to charter state alliances when at least twenty-five locals existed, and for use in all local groups they adopted the constitution of the Cook County Alliance.<sup>28</sup>

The first year that the National Farmers' Alliance was in existence, the organization enjoyed considerable success, especially in the drought-stricken states of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota where poor weather conditions combined with other grievances to produce an upswing in rural discontent.<sup>29</sup> However, Milton George's forceful editorials and appeals for organization contributed to the expansion of the order, as he emphasized that the Alliance presented a means by which distressed farmers might reduce or eliminate some of their abuses. The number of locals increased from 200 in November, 1880, to over 500 two months later and to 940 by October, 1881. State alliances were more difficult to establish, but by the end of January, 1881, they existed in Kansas and Nebraska as well as Iowa where competing groups created two state organizations.<sup>30</sup>

The formation of the Alliance created considerable discussion and many adverse comments from competing journals which tended to see the entire project as simply a clever plan to increase the circulation of the *Western Rural*. None was more outspoken than the *Prairie Farmer*. Although its editor, Jonathan Periam, had participated in the granger movement, the journal could see nothing beneficial in the Alliance and accused the *Western Rural* of much "hollow howling" and of resorting to "theatrical simulation of

<sup>27</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>28</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (October 23, 1880), 340.

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> *Western Rural*, XVIII (November 13, 1880), 364; *ibid.*, XIX (January 1, 1881), 4; *ibid.*, XIX (January 29, 1881), 33, 36; Nixon, "The Populist Movement in Iowa," pp. 16-17.



wrath over imaginary grievances."<sup>31</sup> After the National Farmers' Alliance was formed, the *Prairie Farmer* ridiculed the convention which established it, sneered at the "sun-browned and sinewy" David W. Wood, and observed that one of the principal speeches was given by a lawyer who "based his right of speaking . . . on the grounds that it had been just nineteen years since his lily-white hands had touched that rude implement and symbol of agriculture called a plow." While admitting that the Alliance was a step in the right direction, the journal claimed that when the need arose, farmers would organize without the aid of "titular agriculturists who plow with a lead pencil and reap with the instrument used by Samson against the Philistines."<sup>32</sup> The attitude of the *Prairie Farmer* was typical of the position taken by other farm papers, and it was not until after 1887, when control of the central body was taken from George and the strength of the Alliance was a recognized fact, that other journals gave the movement their support.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Milton George and the *Western Rural* carried the burden alone.

In spite of barbs directed by honest or jealous critics, George remained the central figure in the movement until 1887, and even after his removal from control, the national organization retained many of the characteristics given it at the early meetings. Amendments to the constitution altered only slightly the operation of the group and left the form of the organization much as George had devised it. At the first annual meeting, held in Chicago, October 5-6, 1881, the assembly added a provision allowing the central body to collect an annual fee of ten cents from each member. The effort to become self-supporting, which was opposed by Milton George, proved to be such a failure that the small amount received was refunded and the provision was removed from the constitution a year later. In the absence of adequate support, George carried the entire expense of the central body, and in the course of seven years, he contributed an estimated \$14,000. Not until the famous Minneapolis meeting of 1887 was the national body freed from reliance on its founder for financial support. At that time the constitution was altered to allow the national body to collect fifty cents annually from each state alliance for each local in the state. Further, in an effort to force the forma-

<sup>31</sup> Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, p. 62; *Prairie Farmer*, LI (September 25, 1880), 308.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, LI (October 23, 1880), 340.

<sup>33</sup> *Western Rural*, XXV (October 29, 1887), 707; *ibid.*, XXVII (August 24, 1889), 537.

tion of state bodies, the National Alliance received power to charge unaffiliated locals twenty-five cents a member at the time a charter was granted and annually thereafter until a state alliance was formed.<sup>34</sup>

Representation in the National Alliance was changed in 1881 to give each state alliance two delegates and one additional representative for each 10,000 members or major fraction of that number in the state. Locals unaffiliated with a state organization were allowed one delegate each, but they could be required to vote as a unit. Two years later, the representation was reduced to two delegates selected by the state alliance or by the locals within a state. Finally, in 1887 each state was allowed two delegates and one additional representative for each twenty-five local alliances in good standing. Other changes in the national body included the creation, in 1881, of the office of lecturer, first filled by David W. Wood. At the same time, members of other farm orders were prohibited from becoming officers in the association, and after 1887 they were no longer allowed to sit in the national meetings.<sup>35</sup> In 1883, when the Alliance movement was entering a three-year period characterized by improving economic conditions in agriculture and resultant neglect of the movement by farmers, provision was made in the constitution for honorary members. Such participants were any practical and operative farmers who indicated their support for the principles of the order by signing its constitution.<sup>36</sup> The provision was removed from the constitution in 1887 when it was no longer needed.

During the greater part of the period between 1880 and 1887, Milton George or one connected closely to him served on the board of officers so that George, himself, was largely responsible for the direction of the order. Critics considered his control detrimental, but no other leadership appeared until 1887 when the rising tide of agrarian discontent brought more radical leaders to the fore. During the first year, James W. Wilson, business manager of the *Western Rural*, served as secretary of the National Alliance. From 1881 to 1883 David W. Wood held the post, and in 1881 he was elected to the position of lecturer as well. From 1883 to 1887 Milton George was the national secretary, and since other officers tended to be less

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX (October 15, 1881), 329; *ibid.*, XX (November 4, 1882), 349; *ibid.*, XXV (October 15, 1887), 671.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX (October 15, 1881), 329; *ibid.*, XXI (October 13, 1883), 364; *ibid.*, XXV (October 15, 1877), 671.

<sup>36</sup> A practical farmer, as interpreted by George, included any male, eighteen or above, engaged in farm work as owner, renter, or laborer.



dynamic men, he assumed almost complete responsibility for the continuation of the society.<sup>37</sup>

While Milton George was supporting and guiding the central body of the Alliance, he was attempting to maintain and strengthen the movement on the state and local levels. Throughout the existence of the order, the *Western Rural* gave advice concerning the operation of local bodies, suggested topics for discussion, and printed alliance news when it was available. In 1882 George published a song book for use in locals. Containing a number of rural ballads and patriotic airs as well as a suggested program for alliance meetings, an outline of officers' duties, and other information, it was designed to facilitate the operation of local groups and to make meetings more enjoyable and useful.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime George encouraged organization by allowing his agents to serve as both representatives of the *Western Rural* and as lecturers for the Alliance. In January, 1883, when it appeared that the eight state alliances in existence were deteriorating, George contributed \$25.00 to each of them and indicated his willingness to double the donation if they showed greater energy. Beginning in 1879 and continuing throughout the alliance movement, George printed and distributed reform pamphlets and proceedings of meetings at his own expense.<sup>39</sup> Until the passage of the Interstate Commerce Act in 1887, he agitated unceasingly for its enactment and attempted to secure the support of prominent political leaders, and in 1884 he took petitions bearing over 100,000 signatures to Washington where he conferred with congressmen interested in the problem. Later, he submitted his views on the subject to the Cullom committee.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, he used the pages of the *Western Rural* to denounce other rural injustices and to expose swindlers operating in farming districts. Food adulteration received harsh treatment at his hands, and as late as 1892 he agitated actively for anti-option legislation.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, VII (April 22, 1893), 4; *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1880, p. 7, October 5, 1887, p. 6; National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> David W. Wood, comp., *Western Rural Rules of Order and Rallying Song Book* (Western Rural, Chicago, 1882).

<sup>39</sup> Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, pp. 9-12; National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 12; *Industrial Struggle*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38; Witham, *Fifty Years on the Firing Line*, p. 50; *Senate Report*, No. 46, Appendix, 49th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, 1886), pp. 117-118.

<sup>41</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, p. 39; *Western Rural*, XVIII (March 13, 1880), 84; Milton George to William F. Vilas, June 14, July 6, 1892, Vilas MSS (Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison).

During the years 1883-87, the organization suffered a severe decline, as economic conditions even in such states as Kansas and Nebraska improved and the pangs of agrarian discontent became less acute. The annual convention of 1883 was for all practical purposes a failure, and no more meetings were held until 1886. Meanwhile, most of the state alliances collapsed or became dormant although the establishment of locals continued, at a reduced rate, as George sent out charters freely to farmers indicating a desire to organize. Limited jurisdiction over these groups was exercised by the national body with the understanding that when the state alliances again became active, the new locals would be placed in their proper relationship. This procedure produced general looseness in the organization and led to considerable confusion and controversy, but it maintained the order during a period in which state groups were unsuccessful.<sup>42</sup>

In the meantime George made efforts to aid farmers by establishing cooperative buying schemes, and he devoted attention to expanding the honorary membership. He considered the latter especially important since it brought the isolated farmer into a group while requiring little of his time and the payment of no dues. At the same time it indicated the number of farmers interested in reform and identified those in a community willing to cooperate in such a program, so he believed that it would give the Alliance considerable influence with legislatures and Congress.<sup>43</sup> The membership of the honorary alliance increased rapidly in the latter months of 1885 and throughout 1886, giving a clear indication of the rising tide of discontent among agrarian groups. Encouraged by the marked revival, George set out to increase the power and importance of the association still further. A personal letter, setting forth the abuses of the farmer and the objectives of the Alliance and indicating the advantages arising from it, was published in the *Western Rural* while other copies were printed separately and sent out to farmers for distribution. Connected with the letter was a declaration of nineteen principles which farmers were asked to agree to, sign, and return to George. Members were not required to accept the entire list but could indicate those principles they favored.<sup>44</sup>

George hoped to give the membership immediate and practical

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<sup>42</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIII (July 25, 1885), 469; *ibid.*, XXIV (November 20, 1886), 766; *National Economist*, II (December 14, 1889), 196.

<sup>43</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIV (March 27, 1886), 200.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV (May 15, 1886), 313. The letter and declaration of principles were printed in practically every issue during 1886.

value by allowing the *Western Rural* to serve as a link between participating farmers. They were able to exchange farming information, verify the reliability of firms, and expose the itinerant swindlers operating in rural neighborhoods. Originally, he hoped to establish a purchasing agency to serve as a wholesale house for farmers. When the project proved impractical, he arranged with Chicago stores to sell by mail to farmers at reduced prices. Some of the better known merchants cooperated and offered clothes, dry goods, groceries, harness, lumber and other building materials, barbed wire, and binder twine.<sup>45</sup> By late 1886 George established the "Economy Club" as an agency to sell goods to members at near wholesale prices. In reality the "Club," which handled no goods itself but relayed orders to wholesalers, was a central point from which farmers could order commodities if they were prepared to pay cash. In this manner middlemen were eliminated, and George claimed that it resulted in savings of from 20 to 60 per cent.<sup>46</sup>

The practical results of George's efforts to reduce farmers' operating and living costs cannot be determined, although evidence indicates that hundreds of farmers took advantage of the opportunities offered. Similarly, the total number of farmers enrolled in the honorary alliance will never be known, and it is clear that it did not achieve the long range goals which George outlined.<sup>47</sup> However, it was not a failure. The importance of the honorary alliance lies in its relationship to the remarkable expansion of the agrarian movement during the years after 1887 since it served to maintain interest and to introduce thousands of midwestern farmers to the principle of organization during a critical period.

At the first national meeting since 1883, which convened in Chicago on November 11, 1886, the signs of returning vigor were evident and, with them, the obvious desirability of better organization. While George, as secretary, claimed a membership of 500,000 in sixteen states, the chaotic condition of the order was shown by the lack of reports from ten state alliances, indicating that they were completely dormant. Although Milton George had supported the organization since its establishment, his control and personality had created antagonisms which many believed had retarded its growth. Even George recognized the desirability of making the association self-sufficient and of formalizing the relations between the central

<sup>45</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIV (July 3, 1886), 424.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV (October 23, 1886), 694.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV (May 15, 1886), 313.

body and subordinate groups.<sup>48</sup> Major alterations, however, were postponed until the next annual meeting, held in Minneapolis, October 5, 1887.

The Minneapolis conclave, the most important since the founding of the order, saw the introduction of important changes in the form and direction of the national body. Constitutional revisions making the order self-supporting, strengthening the state alliances, and centralizing the organization were adopted. The meeting also witnessed the rise of state leaders to control the national body, the removal of the direct influence of Milton George, and the adoption of more radical demands.<sup>49</sup> The granting of representation in the National Alliance in proportion to the number of locals in each state increased the power of local leaders from the well-organized states of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas but reduced the influence of Illinois. At the same time arrangements designed to make the order self-supporting freed the organization from its reliance on Milton George, reduced his influence, and placed direction of the order in the hands of such leaders as Jay Burrows of Nebraska, August Post of Iowa, and Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota.<sup>50</sup> Although Milton George attended later meetings and served as one of the vice-presidents in 1891, his role in the national organization came to be little more than that of an elder statesman.

By 1887, however, George to a large degree had completed the task he set for himself a decade earlier. Almost singlehandedly, he had created and maintained for seven years a group destined to become a major regional farm association. But more important, his clarion calls for organization had planted the idea of union in the minds of thousands of discontented farmers in Illinois and throughout the Middle West so that when opportunity presented itself, they flocked into the different rural societies which constituted the alliance movement.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV (November 20, 1886), 766.

<sup>49</sup> Nathan B. Ashby, *The Riddle of the Sphinx* (Mercantile Publishing and Advertising Company, Chicago, 1892), pp. 411-414; *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1887, p. 9; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 7, 1887, p. 4; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>50</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting*, 1891, pp. 4, 11-15, 17-18; *Western Rural*, XXX (June 25, 1892), 407.

### CHAPTER THREE

## The Organizational Base of the Illinois Alliance Movement

The alliance movement in Illinois was complex, including as it did not only the National Farmers' Alliance but four other organizations as well. By 1890 the F.M.B.A., the Southern Alliance, the old Grange, and the Patrons of Industry contested with George's group for the loyalty of Illinois farmers. Organically, the five organizations were distinct entities, and they occupied different parts of the state. Their separate existence produced harmful competition for members, caused no little bickering among leaders, and prevented concerted action by organized farmers, thereby weakening the whole movement. But, in a very real sense, they constituted a unit. All reflected the vague if often expressed desires of farmers to combine for mutual protection, all were heavily imbued with the myths of agrarian fundamentalism, and all evolved educational, social, economic, and political programs calculated to protect the farmer in an industrial society. Finally, all five organizations included in their memberships farmers who had been thoroughly aroused by the principles and ideas espoused so long and so effectively by Milton George.

Illinois was the home of the National Farmers' Alliance, but the pioneer Cook County Alliance was never a true body of farmers and it promptly faded from sight after the national association was formed.<sup>1</sup> The first center of alliance strength in Illinois appeared along the Mississippi River near Rock Island. A local alliance at Keithsburg was among the first chartered, and in April, 1881, a farmer reported that locals existed throughout Mercer County. The organization appeared in Peoria County in December, 1880, and a harvest meeting sponsored by a Fairbury alliance attracted 500 persons in August, 1881. Two months later James W. Wilson reported forty-five locals in Illinois; only one-sixth as many as existed

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<sup>1</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, VI (June 11, 1892), 4.



in Nebraska, but Missouri, Michigan, and Indiana had fewer organizations, and Minnesota had only five more.<sup>2</sup>

When a delegation of Illinois farmers attended the 1881 national convention, Milton George concluded that the time was opportune for Illinois to establish a state alliance. Accordingly, representatives from twelve locals met in Chicago, October 5, 1881, with George and his *Western Rural* associates where they elected officers and adopted a constitution similar in nature to the document governing the national society. The state alliance, which consisted of one delegate from each local, was a loose body with power to do little but charter locals and provide general direction to the order in the state. Officers elected for the first year included William M. Sims, Knox County, president, and David W. Wood, secretary.<sup>3</sup>

The weakness of the organization under the constitution adopted, which included no effective means of controlling the locals and no method of aggressively expanding the order, was all too apparent, and growth was far from satisfactory. During 1882 the order expanded slowly eastward and northward, establishing badly-scattered locals in such widely-separated counties as Bureau and Vermilion. Wood claimed seventy-six alliances with 9,000 members at the annual meeting held in Chicago, September 6, 1882, but the organizations were little different from the typical farmers' clubs which existed throughout the Middle West, and they felt little responsibility toward the state alliance. So few locals were represented at the annual meeting in 1882 that the assembly, after reelecting the board of officers, adjourned to meet a month later. When that gathering failed to materialize, George, who had contributed \$350 to the state alliance during its first year, announced his willingness to extend his aid so that the society might continue. A second annual meeting, scheduled for October 2, 1883, similarly failed, and it was not until 1889 that the locals in Illinois were united by an effective state body.<sup>4</sup>

Although the early state alliance was weak, the locals in Illinois were not without accomplishments. In fact, during the first years the organization developed patterns which continued throughout its

<sup>2</sup> *Western Rural*, XIX (April 2, 1881), 106; *ibid.*, XIX (May 7, 1881), 149; *ibid.*, XIX (December 24, 1881), 409; *ibid.*, XIX (August 27, 1881), 276; *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1881, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Western Rural*, XIX (October 15, 1881), 329; *National Farmers' Alliance, History*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Western Rural*, XX (October 7, 1882), 317; *ibid.*, XX (September 16, 1882), 296; *ibid.*, XXI (September 8, 1883), 290.



existence and influenced other orders in the state as well. In sessions of the early alliances, farmers met together, as often as once a week, to discuss the problems of the day. Methods of farming, women's rights, financial matters, and railroad practices were among the multitude of topics considered. Members learned to think and to express themselves, debates brought out divergent opinions, and participants found their views broadened. Under the auspices of local alliances, farmers and their wives attended picnics where entertainment combined with plentiful food to make rural life more enjoyable. Moreover, early in the life of the movement, members of some locals experimented with elementary forms of cooperative buying and selling.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Milton George and members of the Illinois locals were instrumental in arranging for an antirailroad convention which met in Springfield, March 15, 1882, and which gave a blunt warning to carriers and legislatures that farmers were serious in their demands for effective regulations.<sup>6</sup>

From 1883 to 1886 there was only scattered alliance activity in Illinois. While some of the locals created during the first three years faded and died, others continued to exist, functioning as independent farmers' clubs. Milton George and the *Western Rural* gave them a shadowy unity. Numerous locals, however, showed distinct signs of vigor. In Ford County, alliance leaders, with an eye to both organization and sociability, aided farmers in neighboring areas who wished to form groups, and new activity was reported in Livingston and DeKalb counties. In the meetings discussion tended to be confined to purely agricultural topics, thereby giving the gatherings many of the characteristics of farmers' institutes, but in 1884, a Gibson City alliance did not hesitate to warn the congressman from that district to resist attempts to reduce further the circulating currency.<sup>7</sup>

Although spokesmen blamed the comparative weakness of the early Illinois alliance on the blighting influence of Chicago, which they claimed contained all the evils against which they were contending, the primary reason was the prevalence of relatively good economic conditions. When the Alliance was established, farm prices

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX (August 27, 1881), 276; *ibid.*, XIX (September 3, 1881), 284; *ibid.*, XIX (December 24, 1881), 409.

<sup>6</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1882, p. 3; *Western Rural*, XX (January 7, 1882), 4; *ibid.*, XX (February 11, 1882), 44; *Illinois State Journal*, March 23, 1882, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of alliance activity, see issues of the *Western Rural* for January and February, 1884.

were rising, a trend which continued through 1881. During the next four years falling prices for the basic cereals were offset by favorable weather which produced abundant crops. Farmers in northern and east-central Illinois, if not prosperous, tended to be relatively content. But if conditions were favorable during the early part of the decade, there was a drastic alteration in the later years. During the five years from 1887 through 1891, the price of corn averaged 40 per cent less than the high price of 1881 and wheat was 35 per cent lower. Moreover, the difficulties of cereal producers were compounded by crop failures which, especially in the southern two-thirds of the state, drastically reduced farm income. In 1887 the corn crop was the worst since 1874, and the yield in 1890 was only slightly better. Wheat yields were greatly reduced in 1885, 1888, and 1890, the crop in the latter year being almost a complete failure throughout large areas of the state. Plagues of chinch bugs, grasshoppers, and hog cholera added to the farmers' miseries.<sup>8</sup>

The harmful effects of falling prices, droughts, and insect pests were most noticeable in areas of extensive cereal production and in those regions having relatively heavy mortgage indebtedness. Therefore, it was in east-central Illinois, on the richest farm land in the state, that the revival of the National Farmers' Alliance began. The discovery in 1886 of the existence of a grain dealers' association which successfully reduced competition and lowered prices as much as five cents a bushel provided the needed spark.<sup>9</sup> Outraged farmers turned to the formation of alliances for protection, and locals began to appear in a belt extending southward from McLean and Ford to Jasper and Effingham counties. The center of the resurgence was in Champaign County where two alliances were formed in March, 1886, closely followed by several others. By the end of the year, farmers were well organized throughout the area.<sup>10</sup> At the same time there was renewed activity in the northwestern counties where the movement flourished earlier, and scattered locals appeared in the heart of the southern Illinois wheat-producing region.<sup>11</sup>

During the next two years the organization gained power in east-

<sup>8</sup> "Illinois Agricultural Statistics," pp. 15, 19, 24-25, 81, 86; *Albion Journal*, May 1, 1890, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LIX (August 13, 1887), 518.

<sup>9</sup> *Western Rural*, XXV (January 1, 1887), 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIV (May 8, 1886), 293; *ibid.*, XXIV (August 21, 1886), 533; *ibid.*, XXIV (December 25, 1886), 825; *Champaign County Gazette*, February 16, 1887, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIV (April 10, 1886), 288; *ibid.*, XXIV (May 8, 1886), 293.

central and northwestern Illinois, but it failed to secure followers in appreciable numbers elsewhere. With the exception of a single local in Scott County, there were no alliances in west-central Illinois, nor did the National Farmers' Alliance have significant strength in the southern part of the state, which had been thoroughly preempted by the aggressive F.M.B.A. before 1888.<sup>12</sup> Champaign remained the banner county, having 19 locals and a county organization by February, 1888. A month later George reported a total of 140 locals in the state.<sup>13</sup>

A wave of agitation which arose over the announcement of a rise in binder twine prices in the spring of 1889 produced further organization and led to the reestablishment of the state alliance. In January, 1889, Milton George warned that there was a trust in twine which would raise prices as much as 50 per cent, and spokesmen for other farm groups in the state joined in denouncing the combination.<sup>14</sup> When the increase came on schedule and farmers calculated that it would raise the cost of wheat production fifteen or twenty cents an acre, they were thoroughly aroused and local bodies throughout the state talked of organizing a boycott of the product by using straw to bind grain. The state-wide movement culminated in a meeting at Bloomington in April, 1889, where leaders denounced the twine combination as well as all monopolies and trusts. The "Farmers' Defensive Movement" never met again, but the agitation voiced by its members helped to force twine prices down to 1888 levels,<sup>15</sup> thereby showing the value of organization and convincing alliance members that a state body was a necessity.

A first attempt to establish an effective state alliance was made at a meeting in Bloomington, June 5, 1889. The convention, however, was poorly advertised, and although spokesmen claimed over 150 alliances in the state, only twelve delegates appeared. The group organized itself under the leadership of Hanford Reynolds and Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, Champaign County farmers. After an informal discussion, the gathering set September 19, 1889, as a date

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, XXV (October 8, 1887), 659; *ibid.*, XXVI (April 28, 1888), 265; *Farmers' Voice*, I (February 4, 1888), 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 14, 1887, p. 3; *Western Rural*, XXV (March 5, 1887), 149; *Champaign County Gazette*, February 16, 1887, p. 6, January 4, 1888, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Western Rural*, XXVII (January 19, 1889), 40; *National Economist*, I (May 4, 1889), 108; *ibid.*, I (May 18, 1889), 136.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I (May 11, 1889), 127; *Western Rural*, XXVII (April 27, 1889), 261; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (March 23, 1889), 117; *ibid.*, LXI (May 4, 1889), 281, 288.

for another meeting to be held in Urbana when, presumably, the locals would be better represented. The assembly appointed a committee to advertise and prepare for the gathering, and Heman H. Haaff, a widely-known farm agitator from Henry County, was commissioned to prepare a fighting speech for the occasion.<sup>16</sup>

While plans proceeded for the establishment of a state alliance, a controversy between George and the National Alliance officers erupted, producing further delay and threatening the whole project. George bitterly resented the manner in which he had been removed from control of the national group in 1887, and he strongly disapproved of certain alterations made in the constitution at that session. After the convention he flatly refused to follow the instructions of the central body specifying that only the National Alliance could charter locals in unorganized states, and although the old Illinois State Alliance had not met since 1882, he maintained that it still existed and that its secretary, David W. Wood, had every right to act for it. Consequently, George continued to send out charters to farmers asking for them, and as late as September, 1889, there were no locals in Illinois which were affiliated directly with the national body.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after the abortive Bloomington meeting, the National Alliance decided to establish its jurisdiction in Illinois. Jay Burrows, president of the central body, offered to recognize all locals whose members were eligible under the constitution, and he announced that when a sufficient number of acceptable locals reported to August Post, the national secretary, he would call a meeting where a state body could be formed. George and his supporters resented the implication that ineligible persons had been admitted to the organization, although there can be little doubt that such was the case, and they were outraged with Burrows when he took special care to emphasize that the central body was the sole chartering agency for farmers in unorganized states and that all persons serving as lecturers or organ-

<sup>16</sup> *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, June 6, 1889, p. 4; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County, Illinois* (Chapman Brothers, Chicago, 1887), pp. 782, 856-857; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (June 15, 1889), 377; *Western Rural*, XXVII (June 22, 1889), p. 393. Haaff, a former Chicago lawyer who moved to Henry County after the great fire of 1871, owned a 1,000-acre farm and was widely known for his development of a method for dehorning cattle. Official relations with both the National Farmers' Alliance and the F.M.B.A. made him a leading spokesman in the agrarian movement. See *Portrait and Biographical Album of Henry County, Illinois* (Biographical Publishing Company, Chicago, 1885), pp. 651-653.

<sup>17</sup> *Western Rural*, XXV (October 22, 1887), 694; *ibid.*, XXVI (August 4, 1888), 489; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (September 28, 1889), 624.



izing locals were required to be commissioned by the national group. Although farmers were still applying to George for charters and he, at his own expense, had developed the order in the state, it was obvious that the National Alliance felt it necessary to divorce the Illinois membership from him.<sup>18</sup>

The controversy between George and the National Alliance spread to leaders in Illinois, thereby creating disagreement and confusion and generally retarding the movement at a time when better organized associations were rapidly expanding. Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, who was commissioned as a lecturer by the national group, maintained that cooperation with the National Alliance was a necessity. But an opposition faction, led by Hanford Reynolds, resented what was considered to be dictatorial management by Burrows and felt that unity was secondary to a completely satisfied Illinois membership. Countercharges followed charges in rapid succession as the two groups belabored each other. As a result, the Urbana meeting was a complete failure.<sup>19</sup>

Since the Illinois leaders were deadlocked, the responsibility for calling a state meeting fell by default upon the national officers, and they selected November 20, 1889, as the date for a convention to meet in Decatur. On the appointed day fifty delegates representing sixty alliances appeared. The group elected officers, formalized relations with the National Alliance and adopted the constitution under which the organization was to operate throughout the remainder of its existence. Four officers, elected for one-year terms, directed the association and constituted the governing executive board between annual meetings. Representation in the annual state meeting was established as one delegate from each local with one vote for each twenty members. To make the organization self-supporting, locals were assessed annual per capita dues of twenty-five cents a member.<sup>20</sup> In an effort to expand the order more rapidly, the assembly empowered the president to appoint lecturers in each congressional district. Three were named on the spot and Heman H. Haaff later accepted an appointment. One delegate observed that, as farmers, the organizers had been working for nothing for years, but the convention agreed to pay the lecturers at the rate of

<sup>18</sup> *Western Rural*, XXVII (July 27, 1889), 473; *ibid.*, XXVII (August 24, 1889), 537; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (July 20, 1889), 469.

<sup>19</sup> *Champaign County Gazette*, September 25, 1889, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (September 28, 1889), 624.

<sup>20</sup> *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 20, 1889, p. 1; *Decatur Herald*, November 21, 1889, p. 5; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (December 14, 1889), 793, 801.



\$2.00 for each local organized. Officers elected included Albert E. Brunson, La Salle County, president; and Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, Champaign County, secretary. Alson J. Streeter, a well-known agrarian reformer from New Windsor and former president of the National Alliance, was made a life member of the society.<sup>21</sup>

The actual strength of the National Farmers' Alliance in Illinois remains largely in doubt, but throughout 1889 and 1890, it is clear that the organization grew steadily. During a three weeks period early in 1890, Kirkpatrick issued charters to fourteen new bodies, and he claimed that the rate was not unusual. The number of locals in La Salle County increased from six to eighteen during the year. The increasing strength of the Alliance and the desire for more comprehensive forms of economic cooperation resulted in the formation of county alliances. The first such group was established in Champaign County in 1887, but not until the early months of 1890 were similar units formed in such counties as La Salle, Vermilion, and Iroquois. Only sixty alliances in nine counties were represented at the November, 1889, meeting, but there were over twice that number reported in the state four months earlier.<sup>22</sup> A year later delegates from seventy-five locals in thirty-seven counties appeared, but it was obvious that again considerably less than half the alliances in the state were represented. Total strength was estimated at 7,000 active members. East-central Illinois continued to be the center of the movement, although there were numerous locals throughout northern and west-central Illinois. In the southern zone there were no new alliances, and evidence indicates that the few which had been formed there were absorbed by the more militant F.M.B.A.<sup>23</sup>

The first annual convention of the reconstructed Illinois State Farmers' Alliance met December 10, 1890, in Peoria. There, President Brunson, in his address, recounted the progress of the past year, claimed that the organization had passed its "period of infancy," and called for alterations in the constitution which would allow for more centralized control and encourage further expansion.<sup>24</sup> Ac-

<sup>21</sup> *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 21, 1889, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (January 4, 1890), 1; *Western Rural*, XXVII (December 7, 1889), 777; *History of LaSalle County, Illinois* (2 vols., Inter-State Publishing Company, 1886), II, 21.

<sup>22</sup> *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, June 6, 1889, p. 4; *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (February 8, 1890), 88; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 31, 1891), 69.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 21; *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 20, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, December 11, 1890, p. 1; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 21.

cordingly, the convention took steps to tighten relations between the state, county, and local groups, established bond requirements for state officers, agreed to expand lecturing and organizing work, and attempted to force locals into a common pattern so as to provide greater unity and cohesiveness. Although Milton George was in disfavor with the leaders, the assembly displayed his teachings. It was emphasized that "This organization is strictly nonpartisan in its methods. It is recommended, however, that each member use his utmost influence in the party of his choice to secure the nomination of candidates for Congressional and legislative honors committed to Alliance principles." In the election of officers, Brunson and Kirkpatrick were renamed to their posts.<sup>25</sup>

By 1890 the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance appeared to be in a favorable position. After ten years of rural apathy and poor management, a well-organized state body combined with increasing farmer unrest seemed to insure unrivaled success. But, for the National Farmers' Alliance in Illinois, effective organization came too late. By the time it was in a position to expand rapidly, it found much of the state occupied by such other groups as the F.M.B.A. which, in the main, accepted the objectives of Milton George but used more effective techniques to forward them.

In contrast to the National Farmers' Alliance, the F.M.B.A. was not the creation of one man, and in fact, its formation resulted more from accident than design. In the early fall of 1883, five farmers appeared at Vienna, a small town in Johnson County, with loads of wheat for sale. When a local buyer informed them that, due to an unsteady market, he could not handle their produce, the farmers suspected him of trickery. Resolving to settle their difficulties, they telegraphed the St. Louis market, received a favorable reply, and, using an available boxcar, shipped their grain directly to the city. Upon receiving payment, the farmers found that not only had they sold their crop at an acceptable price but they had also deprived an obnoxious middleman of his usual fee.<sup>26</sup>

When neighboring farmers learned of the experiment, they began banding together to enjoy similar advantages. Since the shipping of grain required the gathering of sufficiently large amounts to warrant the use of an entire railroad car and because the farmers thought secrecy was necessary, a simple form of organization emerged. In

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX (January 24, 1891), 53; *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (December 20, 1890), 801; *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Stelle, *Song Book*, pp. 1-2; Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, p. 59.

all, five clubs appeared in Johnson County in the fall and early winter of 1883. Later, the desirability of a central association led to a meeting at New Burnside where participants adopted a crude constitution and a set of bylaws, formulated a basic ritual, and chose the name, Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, for the order. The constitution established a central body, known as the general assembly, which met every three months and provided general direction for the society. Locals were represented in proportion to strength. The constitution provided a simple means of expansion by allowing locals to organize others upon the petition of at least ten farmers. Following the formation of a new club, the secretary of the organizing local made a report to the secretary of the general assembly who issued a charter to the new body.<sup>27</sup>

The subordinate groups, which included adult males but excluded women, were similar in form to the locals of the National Farmers' Alliance but had secret features modeled after those of the Odd Fellows fraternal association.<sup>28</sup> During the first years, the members developed a badge and an initiation procedure which continued in use throughout the life of the movement. While the latter was reported to be "beautiful and impressive," it was known locally as "riding the mule" and consisted in part of requiring the initiate to walk blindfolded and barefooted down an aisle, usually in a rural school house, in which boards with exposed nails had been placed. These were quietly removed as the initiate approached and replaced as he passed.<sup>29</sup>

During the first three years after its establishment, the F.M.B.A. spread into the counties bordering on Johnson and reached a total membership of about 2,000. Although the growth was slow, the method of expansion used during the early years gave the organization a hard core of solidly organized strength, providing it with obvious advantages over contemporary groups. Milton George's technique, for example, guaranteed rapid expansion in terms of numbers but produced an organization with badly scattered locals and little

<sup>27</sup> Stelle, *Song Book*, pp. 2-3; J. E. Bryan, *The Farmers' Alliance, Its Origin, Progress, and Purposes* (Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1891), p. 68; *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 42-43. The title chosen was, perhaps, unfortunate. Since the order came to be known by its initials, it was easy for opponents to ridicule it. A contemporary claimed that the letters, F.M.B.A., meant "fill my bottle again." Harvey E. Dorsey to author, November 10, 1955.

<sup>28</sup> Stelle, *Song Book*, pp. 2-3; Bryan, *Farmers' Alliance*, p. 68.

<sup>29</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1890, p. 6; *National Economist*, II (November 16, 1889), 134; interview with John H. Nowlan, Greenville, Illinois, August 24, 1956.

unity. The F.M.B.A. during its first years also avoided the pitfalls inherent in the use of paid lecturers whose extravagant promises often led to a disappointed membership and resultant failure.<sup>30</sup>

Early in 1887, after the organization had established a firm base, spokesmen pointed out that the movement was without "form or void" and that the time was opportune for more aggressive expansion. In an attempt to increase the power of the group, the general assembly in April, 1887, appointed Fred G. Blood of Jefferson County as the first of its official organizers, and three months later the assembly selected committees to secure incorporation and to revise the constitution. At a meeting in Du Quoin, October 6, 1887, a group of 500 farmers accepted a new constitution authorized under a state charter granted September 1, 1887. It empowered the association to establish locals throughout the United States and outlined the pattern which the order followed the remainder of its life. The new constitution created a centralized organization with assemblies on three levels. The subordinate lodge was the basic unit, meeting at least twice a month and including at least ten adult males who met strict residence, occupation, and moral requirements. Officers were elected for six-month terms at the first regular meetings in April and October. The subordinate lodges were represented in an intermediate body, the county assembly, which met quarterly and exercised direct supervision over the locals within its jurisdiction. Each county group, in turn, was represented in the general assembly, which, as the supreme power within the association, had complete control of the order, enacted all laws, and furnished charters to both county and local groups. Its officers were elected for one-year terms at the annual meeting. A special committee of five, known as the board of trustees, was elected annually and served as the legal head of the order between sessions of the general assembly.<sup>31</sup>

For the support of the organization, the constitution authorized the association to collect a \$1.00 charter fee from both county assemblies and local groups and to assess members a quarterly fee of one cent. Other expenses of the individual member included a fifty-

<sup>30</sup> Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, p. 59; Stelle, *Song Book*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 5, 1887, p. 1; *Du Quoin Tribune*, October 6, 1887, p. 1; Stelle, *Song Book*, p. 4; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *General Charter, Declaration of Purpose, and Constitution and By-Laws* (F.M.B.A. Publishing Company, Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 1890), pp. 2-25; *National Economist*, II (November 16, 1889), 134.



cent initiation fee and quarterly dues of twenty-five cents, which supported the subordinate groups. County assemblies charged small annual or quarterly fees, varying in size, for their maintenance. Regular officers served without salaries, but the central association paid the expenses of authorized delegates attending general assembly meetings.<sup>32</sup>

Like the National Farmers' Alliance, the F.M.B.A. could not escape the inevitable controversies among its members. Early in the history of the movement, A. M. Palmer, one of the early leaders, began publishing in Marion a paper known as the *Binder* which became the official journal of the organization. Later, Fred G. Blood succeeded Palmer as editor and manager, but the paper failed to prosper despite direct support by the association. Moreover, Blood disapproved of changes which had been made in the society and used the *Binder* to voice his opinions. The split among the leaders led to a special meeting of the general assembly in December, 1887, where 600 delegates rejected Blood's contentions, relieved him of his position within the association, and named John P. Stelle of Hamilton County as secretary of the central body.<sup>33</sup>

The shift in leadership brought to the forefront the leader who thereafter dominated the association. Stelle served as one of the first trustees and, after his selection as secretary, he became the voice of the order. In the spring of 1888, after concluding that the effectiveness of the *Binder* had been destroyed by mismanagement and controversy, the organization asked Stelle to establish a new journal. The first issue of the *Progressive Farmer*, a weekly published in Mt. Vernon, appeared April 21, 1888. By 1890 the new magazine claimed a circulation of almost 7,000 and a year later, over 16,000 farmers were subscribers, making the *Progressive Farmer* the most popular paper in southern Illinois, except for the metropolitan dailies from St. Louis and Chicago.<sup>34</sup> In addition Stelle published a variety of songbooks, rituals, proceedings of meetings, and other materials needed by the membership.

<sup>32</sup> Stelle, *Song Book*, p. 6; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *General Charter*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>33</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 27, 1887, p. 2; Bryan, *Farmers' Alliance*, p. 69; *Wayne County Press*, December 29, 1887, January 5, 1888, typewritten copies in possession of the author.

<sup>34</sup> Stelle, *Song Book*, pp. 5-6; *Portrait and Biographical Record of Clinton, Washington, Marion, and Jefferson Counties, Illinois* (Chapman Publishing Company, Chicago, 1894), pp. 310-311, 482; Eliza Coker Stelle, *Diary*, MSS, January 1, 1889, January 1, 1890, January 1, 1891, in possession of Clarence A. Stelle, East St. Louis, Illinois.



Stelle, as a matter of fact, was exceptionally well qualified for his task. The son of a pioneer farmer who migrated from New Jersey, he was born in Calhoun County, Illinois, in 1843. Three years later, the family moved to Hamilton County, where Stelle grew to manhood. An attack of infantile paralysis prevented his attending school until he was thirteen years of age, but once exposed to formal education, he made rapid progress. As early as 1860, he worked for a local newspaper publisher, studied the printing trade, and contributed articles for publication. The same year, he was licensed to teach in the common schools, beginning a career which he followed, intermittently, the remainder of his life. During the Civil War, he displayed an intense patriotism and, for a period, published a paper dedicated to the Union cause.<sup>35</sup> The late 1860's found him teaching school and managing a small farm which he had acquired near Dahlgren. When the postwar depression in agriculture appeared, he participated in the granger movement, became a Greenbacker, and in the 1870's published a reform paper, the *Golden Era*. After Greenbackism faded, he returned to farming and teaching, and as late as January, 1888, he served as a rural school teacher in Jefferson County. Although unsuccessful in a material way, the experience gained from a varied career made him a persuasive writer and a powerful speaker and convinced him that only through organization could the rural classes protect themselves from the power of wealth.<sup>36</sup>

The combination of effective and dynamic leadership with deteriorating economic conditions was reflected after 1887 in the rapid growth of the F.M.B.A. and its expansion into neighboring states. In October, 1887, the organization had 389 subordinate lodges with an estimated membership of 15,000 and in November, 1888, 942 locals and 31 county assemblies.<sup>37</sup> A year later, Stelle reported a total of 2,181 lodges and 76 county groups, and in November, 1890, there were 4,947 lodges and 154 county groups spread through nine states. Membership was more difficult to determine and figures ap-

<sup>35</sup> John P. Stelle, *A Record of the Travels, Adventures, and Incidents in the Life of John P. Stelle of Hamilton County, Illinois*, MSS, in possession of Clarence A. Stelle, East St. Louis, Illinois; Elsie Stelle Winkler to author, September 27, 1955; Clarence A. Stelle to author, December 15, 1955; *Clinton, Washington, Marion, and Jefferson Counties*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>36</sup> Scott, *Newspapers and Periodicals*, p. 230; *National Economist*, VI (December 5, 1891), 179; Clarence A. Stelle to author, December 15, 1955; Eliza Coker Stelle, *Diary*, MSS, January 1, 1888.

<sup>37</sup> *Du Quoin Tribune*, October 30, 1887, p. 1; Stelle, *Song Book*, p. 6; Bryan, *Farmers' Alliance*, p. 69.

pearing in local newspapers or issued by prominent leaders occasionally far outdistanced facts. Nevertheless, in November, 1890, official records showed that the organization had 107,785 members in good standing. Illinois and Indiana claimed almost 90 per cent of the total enrollment.<sup>38</sup>

The rapid expansion of the order necessitated a final change in the constitution. To prevent the general assembly from becoming unmanageably large, the constitution in November, 1889, was altered to allow for the establishment of state assemblies. These bodies were made up of delegates from county assemblies, and they, in turn, were represented in the general assembly. Within a year after they were authorized, state assemblies existed in six states.<sup>39</sup> The Illinois state body was formed at a meeting in Centralia, February 4, 1890, where delegates from twenty county assemblies established the permanent organization and elected Cicero J. Lindley, a prominent Bond County farmer and judge, as president.<sup>40</sup> The first regular session of the Illinois group convened in Springfield, October 21, 1890, where spokesmen claimed that the state contained 1,650 local lodges and had registered a 100 per cent gain in membership in less than a year. A month later, John P. Stelle reported 43,175 members in Illinois but claimed that 5,044 more could be counted, although they had failed to pay their dues.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time that the order increased its membership in Illinois, it expanded in geographical area. At the end of 1886, the major part of the organization's strength was limited to six counties, but early the next year, the F.M.B.A. began a rapid expansion northward, occupied most of southern Illinois, and moved into the central part of the state. The absorption in 1887 of independent farmers' clubs in Marion, Clinton, and Washington counties signified the growing power of the organization; in 1888 the remainder of the lower counties were fully occupied. By 1889 the organization strengthened its position in central Illinois by moving into Clark,

<sup>38</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, II (January 2, 1890), p. 5; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, pp. 3-4; Stelle, *Song Book*, p. 6; *Western Rural*, XXIX (February 14, 1891), 101.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVIII (February 8, 1890), 85; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *General Charter*, pp. 10, 15-17; *Progressive Farmer*, II (January 2, 1890), 4; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, II (February 2, 1890), 4; *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, February 12, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, October 21, 1890, p. 5; *Jacksonville Daily Journal*, October 23, 1890, p. 1.

Cumberland, and Shelby counties, and a year later the order was in the counties east of the lower Illinois River, including Madison, Jersey, and Macoupin.<sup>42</sup> The greatest gains, in fact, were registered in central Illinois where the F.M.B.A. competed successfully with Milton George's National Farmers' Alliance. At a meeting of the general assembly in November, 1890, Stelle reported the formation of assemblies in ten east-central Illinois counties, including several which earlier had locals of the National Alliance. Some of the newly-organized counties reported enormous memberships. By 1890 Christian and Shelby counties claimed more than 2,000 members each; Sangamon and Moultrie had almost 1,500.<sup>43</sup>

In the northern third of Illinois, where the revived Grange and the National Farmers' Alliance as well as the Patrons of Industry claimed members, the F.M.B.A. had little strength. Stelle reported county assemblies in Rock Island, Du Page, and Winnebago counties, but locals were widely scattered and were of little importance to the organization.<sup>44</sup> A similar situation existed in the west-central counties, especially those situated between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers. There, the presence of locals of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, or the Southern Alliance, prevented successful F.M.B.A. work.

The introduction of the Southern Alliance into Illinois stemmed from the failure of southern leaders' efforts to unify the various agricultural organizations into a truly national order. As early as 1886 spokesmen for the Texas State Alliance, a group which originated independently of Milton George but which included a number of locals organized by him, approached National Farmers' Alliance leaders, looking toward consolidation, but concluded that George's loose organizing methods and his willingness to admit Negroes as equals made unity impractical.<sup>45</sup> Consolidation of all southern farmers appeared to be more feasible, at least as a first step, so in 1887 the Texas group led by the magnetic Charles W. Macune united

<sup>42</sup> Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, p. 59; *Centralia Daily Sentinel*, January 27, 1887; *Albion Journal*, July 26, 1888, p. 4, December 21, 1889, p. 2; *Alton Sentinel-Democrat*, March 6, 1890, p. 9, October 23, 1890, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, p. 3; *Progressive Farmer*, II (January 2, 1890), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, p. 3; *Rockford Daily Register*, July 16, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 35-36; *Western Rural*, XXIX (November 28, 1891), 763; Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 68, 107, 109.

with the Louisiana Farmers' Union to form the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union.<sup>46</sup> A year later Macune invited the Arkansas Agricultural Wheel and the F.M.B.A. to send delegates to a meeting at Meridian, Mississippi, where the possibilities of further consolidation might be considered. Representatives appeared, and the Arkansas group joined on the spot.<sup>47</sup>

The F.M.B.A. exercised greater caution about the matter. Macune, in inviting this group, corresponded with Fred G. Blood who was in disfavor with the leaders of the order. Only after lengthy discussion did the Illinois group agree to send a delegate, and instead of Blood, the F.M.B.A. selected T. D. Hinckley, a prominent leader from Hoyleton. Blood, however, attended as an individual and played an important role in the convention. Moreover, he and Hinckley joined with southern leaders in drawing up plans for a consolidation, gave their "concurrence" to the arrangements when they were completed, and led the southerners to believe that the F.M.B.A. would quickly ratify the agreement.<sup>48</sup> It was eleven months later before the general assembly took up the matter. Although supporters of union claimed that preliminary reports showed that a majority of members favored joining the Southern Alliance, the opposition of prominent leaders prevented any action. After John P. Stelle had reminded members of the general assembly that the proposed union would lead to the "loss of our name and all we hold dear," the convention rejected consolidation and offered the Southern Alliance only "pledges of cooperation." The settlement failed to satisfy Blood and his followers, and their displeasure with what they considered to be dictatorial leadership was increased by Stelle's refusal to discuss the topic in the columns of the *Progressive Farmer*.<sup>49</sup>

A last major effort to unite the Northern and Southern alliances was made in December, 1889, when both groups held their annual meetings in St. Louis. Prior to the opening of the assemblies, leaders

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 64-68, 72, 89-90; *National Economist*, I (September 7, 1889), 386; *Farmers' Voice*, II (January 5, 1889), 6.

<sup>47</sup> See Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), chap. 5, for an excellent account of the merger movement among southern farm groups which culminated in the formation of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union.

<sup>48</sup> Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, p. 39; *National Economist*, II (January 4, 1890), 202; *ibid.*, I (April 13, 1889), 57; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (July 13, 1889), 448; *Farmers' Voice*, II (January 5, 1890), 6.

<sup>49</sup> *National Economist*, II (October 19, 1889), 72; *ibid.*, II (January 4, 1890), 37; *Progressive Farmer*, II (January 2, 1890), 4.



of both associations appeared to be confident of success, but as the gatherings progressed, it became apparent that the high hopes were not to be realized. Although the southerners made several notable concessions, the Northern Alliance leaders rejected organic union. Undoubtedly, differing economic objectives, sectional bitterness, and personal ambition destroyed the project.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the reasons for northern hesitancy, many northern state delegations were more receptive to southern overtures. As a result, a split appeared in northern ranks, and despite pressure from their national officers, the delegates from Kansas and South Dakota went into the Southern Alliance as a group while the representatives from other states were clearly interested.<sup>51</sup>

After the failure of consolidation at St. Louis, the Southern Alliance, under the able leadership of Leonidas L. Polk, began an aggressive expansion into northern states. Southern organizers appeared in Indiana, and a state alliance was established there early in 1890. Michigan farmers soon established a similar body, and by June, 1890, there were southern state associations in both Dakotas and in Wisconsin. Thereafter, until the alliance movement faded completely from the scene, the southern group continued its invasion of the northern states, where its followers either established organizations of their own or tried to take control of existing northern groups.<sup>52</sup>

In Illinois, dissatisfied F.M.B.A. members carried the Southern Alliance banner. Fred G. Blood resented his loss of authority in the organization, and when Stelle and his followers refused to accept

<sup>50</sup> *National Economist*, II (October 12, 1889), 63; *Farmers' Voice*, II (October 5, 1889), 5; *Western Rural*, XXVII (October 5, 1889), 633; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 2, 1889, p. 3, December 5, 1889, p. 7; Blood, *National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union*, pp. 39-40; Herman C. Nixon, "The Cleavage within the Farmers' Alliance Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XV (June, 1928), 24-30.

<sup>51</sup> Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 121, 124, 130-131; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 7, 1889, p. 7, December 8, 1889, p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> *National Economist*, III (June 28, 1890), 232; Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 134, 241; *Chicago Tribune*, September 18, 1890, p. 2. The competition from the southern group, in fact, did the Northern Alliance incalculable harm. Not only did Southern Alliance men try to induce northern leaders to transfer their allegiance, but they bitterly and openly denounced all who stood in opposition to them. In addition, spokesmen for the Southern Alliance in northern states tended to be third-party advocates, and they vigorously attacked those leaders who accepted Milton George's nonpartisan principles. For example, see H. L. Loucks to Ignatius Donnelly, June 13, 1891, December 24, 1892, A. J. Westfall to Ignatius Donnelly, February 4, March 10, 1892, Donnelly MSS (Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul).



unity with the Southern Alliance, the disgruntled element grew. At the St. Louis meeting, Blood and Hinckley were initiated into the Southern Alliance and were chosen to lead it into Illinois. The first local group of the Southern Alliance appeared in Richland County when Blood organized a club at Noble, December 27, 1889. The great strength of the F.M.B.A. in that area, however, excluded any widespread development so it was in west-central Illinois, in the counties situated between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, that the Southern Alliance achieved its greatest successes.<sup>53</sup> The first county alliance was established April 5, 1890, at Clayton in Adams County. Meanwhile, organizers of the new group ventured across the Illinois River, appearing in Greene County as early as August, 1890. By December there were nine locals in the neighborhood, and a county alliance was established. The adjoining county to the north, Scott, soon claimed a county association, and by the early part of 1891 the territory organized by the southern group extended into Morgan and Cass counties and as far north as Henry and Whiteside counties. In July, 1890, southern leaders claimed 2,000 members in at least seven county assemblies, and three months later official figures showed thirteen counties organized with a membership of 3,473 in 160 lodges.<sup>54</sup>

Since the Illinois leaders were eager to establish a state body, they called a meeting at Morrison in Whiteside County, July 15, 1890, where they formed a temporary state alliance. The first officers included Marcus L. Crum, a large Cass County farmer, president, and Fred G. Blood, secretary.<sup>55</sup> State associations of the Southern Alliance included delegates from at least seven county groups, had a high degree of power over the locals within the state, and were represented in the annual meetings of the national body by one delegate and one additional representative for every 10,000 members. A system of fees and dues provided the order with a relatively abundant income. Membership in locals of the Southern Alliance was limited to persons over sixteen who had resided in the state for

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<sup>53</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, III (March 1, 1890), 12; *National Economist*, III (March 29, 1890), 28.

<sup>54</sup> Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 240-241; *White Hall Register*, August 29, 1890, p. 4, December 19, 1890, p. 4; *Western Rural*, XXIX (May 9, 1891), 293; *Illinois State Journal*, October 28, 1890, p. 4; Matt Hoots to Ignatius Donnelly, August 11, 1891, Donnelly MSS.

<sup>55</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, III (August 2, 1890), 16; William H. Perrin, ed., *History of Cass County, Illinois* (O. L. Boskin and Company, Chicago, 1882), pp. 314-317; Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 240-241.

at least six months and who "believed in the existence of a Supreme Being." In contrast to other farm orders in the state, the southern group specifically admitted "mechanics," country school teachers, preachers, and doctors as well as editors of purely agricultural papers. Each state was permitted to make its own regulations concerning the admission of Negroes, but no state was allowed to send a colored delegate to a meeting of the national body. New members were admitted upon the recommendation of two actives and after investigation by a three-man committee.<sup>56</sup>

Three months after the formation of the temporary state association, fifty delegates, representatives from thirteen county societies, appeared at Springfield where they completed the organization of the state body. Under the guidance of Ben Terrell, national lecturer, the delegates perfected the organization, reelected the officers chosen at the Morrison meeting, and selected an executive board which was the governing agency between annual sessions.<sup>57</sup> Recognizing the need for an official voice comparable to the *Progressive Farmer*, the delegates selected a committee to secure incorporation of a publishing concern and to make other necessary arrangements. As a result, a paper known as the *Alliance Free Lance* was begun at Springfield, edited originally by Fred G. Blood and later by T. D. Hinckley.<sup>58</sup>

After the establishment of a permanent state organization and through the early months of 1891, the Southern Alliance enjoyed considerable success in the western counties of Illinois. Encouraged by an array of colorful and dynamic speakers, including William A. Pepper, farmer-senator from Kansas, Charles W. Macune, Leonidas L. Polk, and Lavina E. Roberts, a home-grown version of Mary E. Lease, the order dominated the territory between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers south of Rock Island as well as a band of counties on the east bank of the Illinois.<sup>59</sup> By October, 1891, Secretary Blood was able to report that the number of organized counties had doubled from the 13 listed the previous year while the number of

<sup>56</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, October 31, 1890, p. 1; *National Economist*, V (April 4, 1891), 41; Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, pp. 442-452.

<sup>57</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1890, p. 2; *Illinois State Journal*, October 31, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, October 29, 1890, p. 1, October 30, 1890, p. 1; *National Economist*, IV (January 24, 1891), 305; T. D. Hinckley to Ignatius Donnelly, March 8, 1893, Donnelly MSS.

<sup>59</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, V (August 15, 1891), 3; *National Economist*, V (June 13, 1891), 197; *ibid.*, VI (November 28, 1891), 171.

lodges increased from 160 to 459 with a total membership of 12,000. Pike, Adams, Brown, Cass, and Hancock counties had the strongest organizations.<sup>60</sup>

In terms of membership, the Southern Alliance in Illinois by 1891 was almost equal to the Grange, but the latter had a much wider geographical base. Formed in 1867 by Oliver H. Kelley, the Grange was secret, used a complex ritual, and was designed to help the farmer adjust educationally, socially, and economically to the conditions of an industrial society. The first grange in Illinois was formed by Kelley in the office of the *Prairie Farmer*, April 23, 1868.<sup>61</sup> Success did not come immediately, but beginning in 1872, economic conditions began a disastrous deterioration and granger activity increased accordingly. By January 1, 1875, authorities counted 1,533 subordinate or local groups in the state. But after that date, the Grange in Illinois, as elsewhere, went into a drastic decline, and by July 1, 1876, only 646 locals remained.<sup>62</sup>

The decline of the Grange in the Prairie State continued for a decade after 1875. During the administration of Albert P. Forsythe, the second state master, the strength of the order continued to fall, and by November, 1882, Edward A. Giller, Forsythe's successor, reported only 181 subordinate granges in the state.<sup>63</sup> A year later there were 3,779 members in 125 local bodies, and in 1885, Giller counted 100 granges containing 3,200 actives. While the collapse in Illinois was not as complete as in Iowa where only eight locals remained by 1885, the prospects were far from encouraging. At a time when all agrarian organizational efforts suffered from farmer apathy, the Grange in Illinois was further handicapped by a \$1,600 debt incurred by earlier extravagance and participation in unwise business ventures.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *Illinois State Register*, October 28, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Oliver H. Kelley, *Origin and Progress of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry in the United States* (J. A. Wagenseller, Philadelphia, 1875), p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> Buck, *Granger Movement*, p. 47, chart following p. 64; A. E. Paine, *The Granger Movement in Illinois* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1904), p. 10. For a study of the Grange in a typical county, see Roy V. Scott, "Grangerism in Champaign County, Illinois, 1873-1877," *Mid-America*, XLIII (July, 1961), 139-163.

<sup>63</sup> Buck, *Granger Movement*, chart following p. 64; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1882, p. 29. Elected state master in 1875, Forsythe served until 1882 when he resigned and moved to Kansas. Edward A. Giller, a widely-known farmer from Greene County, was state master from 1882 to 1887. His successor was John M. Thompson of Will County.

<sup>64</sup> National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*,

During its period of power, the Grange established patterns of organization which continued through the 1880's and 1890's into the twentieth century. Since the Illinois group was a segment of the national organization, the ritual, hierarchy of officers, degrees, and secret features were prescribed by the National Grange, and only in local matters did the state organization possess autonomy. After 1882 the state Grange was composed of its officers and delegates from all county and local organizations in the state. Officers of the body, who were the same in title and approximate duties on all levels of the order, were elected biennially. Between annual sessions the management of the state group rested in the hands of an executive committee, composed of the master and secretary who were ex officio members and three others elected for two-year terms.<sup>65</sup> Below the state body, there were county or district granges. They were less important in the Patrons of Husbandry than in competing orders because, after 1882, they did not serve as intermediaries between the state and local groups. Their function was primarily social although, in some areas, they served as centers for more comprehensive cooperative business enterprises and as courts of appeal where differences between locals were settled. County granges were formed when thirteen members from at least three subordinate groups applied to the state Grange. Membership did not imply representation of the local bodies; instead, any member of a local in the county who possessed the required qualifications and paid the initiation and quarterly fee was eligible to attend the meetings, held usually in March, June, September, and December.<sup>66</sup>

The subordinate grange, the basic unit of the order, included any person, at least fourteen years old, whose "principle occupation and source of revenue derived from agricultural pursuits." New locals were formed by lecturers or deputies who appeared at rural meetings and organized the qualified farmers present. Additional new members were admitted after being recommended by two actives

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1883, p. 39; *ibid.*, 1885, pp. 46-47; Louis B. Schmidt, "Farmers' Organizations," in *A Century of Farming in Iowa, 1846-1946* (Iowa State College Press, Ames, 1946), p. 324; *Prairie Farmer*, LIX (January 29, 1887), 73.

<sup>65</sup> Jeanette E. Yates, "History of Fifty Years in Illinois State Grange" (Mimeographed pamphlet distributed at the Illinois State Grange meeting, 1946); Kelley, *Patrons of Husbandry*, p. 97; Illinois State Grange, *By-Laws, Rules of Order, and Rules for Subordinate Grange Trials* (Peoria, Illinois, 1890), pp. 1-6.

<sup>66</sup> Champaign County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, September 17, 1873; Illinois State Grange, *By-Laws*, pp. 18-19; Greene County Pomona Grange, *By-Laws* (Greenfield, Illinois, 1891), pp. 1-5.



and approved by a committee of investigation. The subordinate granges met regularly at least once a month, but special meetings were not uncommon. The officers, similar in title to those on other levels of the order, were elected for one-year terms at the regular meeting in December. An executive committee served as the legal head and directing agency between meetings.<sup>67</sup>

In 1886 State Master Giller began efforts to revive and strengthen the organization in Illinois. Although the hard times which began in the middle of the decade made the payment of fees a hardship, many members indicated a willingness to contribute materially to the expansion of the order. Accordingly, Giller induced the Greene County Grange as well as others to raise money among their members to pay lecturers. At the same time, members made contributions to the state Grange which removed the debts burdening it, thereby placing the body on a sound financial basis.<sup>68</sup> By 1888 intensification of economic pressures caused increased granger activity. Several new grange halls appeared, indicating renewed faith in the order, and harvest festivals, picnics, and encampments where farmers discussed their difficulties and heard grange speakers prescribe cures became more frequent. Encouraged by the marked revival, leaders became more energetic and aggressive in promoting the organization. During 1889 the secretary of the state Grange and other officers held public meetings throughout northern and central Illinois where the interest was most pronounced. At the same time, the new state master, John M. Thompson of Will County, called upon each local and county club to conduct door-to-door campaigns in the search for new members, and he brought grange leaders from other states into Illinois to aid in the work.<sup>69</sup>

The effort, combined with general hard times and the widespread agitation over the twine trust, soon produced noticeable results. New granges appeared, old ones displayed a new vitality, and additional members were enrolled in existing locals. When the state

<sup>67</sup> Illinois State Grange, *By-Laws*, pp. 9-14, 17-18; Champaign Grange, Proceedings, MSS, September 5, 1873 (Illinois Historical Survey, Urbana).

<sup>68</sup> National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1886, pp. 33-34; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, March 26, 1886 (this source is in the possession of Miss Mabel L. Griswold, White Hall, Illinois); *Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, January 14, 1887, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, II (February 9, 1889), p. 10; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (February 9, 1889), p. 81; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889 (Peoria, Illinois), p. 45.



Grange met in December, 1889, it was apparent that the order was far from dead and that it had a growing following in the state. In the course of the year, seventeen new granges were created, thirty-three locals were reactivated, and five others, previously dormant but carried on the rolls, were revived. At the end of the grange year, there were 154 subordinate bodies and there was a net membership gain of 1,690, giving a total of near 4,700. Significantly, the greatest increase in membership occurred in Vermilion County where 16 granges with 556 members were created in nine months.<sup>70</sup>

The expansion of the Grange continued through 1890 and into 1891. Following a decision by the National Grange to allow each state to regulate its own fees, the state Grange in Illinois reduced its dues to compete with other farm organizations, and some local and county groups announced their willingness to admit new members entirely free of cost. The door-to-door canvassing for members continued with good results, and large grange feasts and picnics were held to attract farmers and their families. Over 5,000 people attended a Grange Fair at Charleston, 2,000 others appeared at an annual function held at Henry and a four-day encampment at Pawnee drew great crowds.<sup>71</sup> The secretary's reports given at the annual state Grange meetings showed the results of the activity. In the course of 1890, the organization had a net gain of 42 subordinate bodies, 2 county granges, a district association, and 2,467 members, making a total membership of 7,500 in 196 local clubs. The following year, 1891, the society added 30 subordinate groups, 2 county granges, and 3,797 new members, giving a total strength by December of that year of 11,500 actives.<sup>72</sup>

In geographical distribution the revived Grange claimed its greatest strength in the central part of the state. In December, 1890, over half of the locals were located there as well as eleven of the nineteen county or district granges. The heaviest concentration of locals was

<sup>70</sup> *Ottawa Republican*, April 12, 1889, p. 3; *Marseilles Plaindealer*, May 3, 1889, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (February 9, 1889), 81; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, December 5, 1889; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, pp. 38-39, 34-35.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 1890, pp. 26, 41; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, August 15, 1890; *Henry Times*, October 2, 1890, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1890, p. 4, August 28, 1890, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1890, pp. 54-55; *ibid.*, 1891, pp. 10-17, 25-26; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, November 13, 1890, May 28, 1891; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1891, pp. 40-41; Social Grange, Secretary's Report, 1891, MSS (this source is in the possession of Miss Mabel L. Griswold of White Hall, Illinois).

found in Vermilion, Sangamon, Greene, Mason, Fulton, and Schuyler counties. The northern district possessed a third of all activity, the greatest interest being shown in Peoria, La Salle, Knox, Will, and Winnebago counties. The order enjoyed little success in southern Illinois where the great strength of the F.M.B.A. prevented granger inroads. With the exception of seven isolated locals scattered through the district, the only concentrated organization existed in Edwards and Wabash counties where the success of the order was explained by the presence of the prominent and dedicated Sheavington family.<sup>73</sup>

A fifth agricultural association completed the Illinois farm organizational picture. The Patrons of Industry was formed in Sanilac County, Michigan, in the fall of 1887 by F. W. Vertican, a retired country minister, and F. W. Kraus, a printer from Port Huron who became the publisher of the *Western Farm and Home*, the official journal of the order. The association possessed a ritual and an initiation ceremony, somewhat similar to those of the Grange, and was originally so secret that names of its leaders were withheld from the public. Rapid growth followed its establishment so that by October, 1889, it claimed 75,000 members in Michigan alone.<sup>74</sup> The constitution of the group specified that grand associations could be established in states having at least six county clubs. The county associations, in turn, were formed when at least four locals existed. The basic unit of the order contained a minimum of ten persons, either male or female, who were employed as farmers or common laborers.<sup>75</sup>

In its expansion the Patrons of Industry used techniques common to contemporary farm orders. Besides holding the usual picnics and rallies where prospective members were induced to join, the organization dispatched organizers into remote areas to speak to groups of farmers. The payment of lecturers on a commission basis occasionally led to a disillusioned membership and resultant failure, but at the outset it produced rapid growth.<sup>76</sup> As the order expanded,

<sup>73</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, pp. 6-8; *ibid.*, 1890, p. 54; *Cass Street Sketches* (C. B. Hayward Company, Joliet, Illinois, 1897), pp. 90-97; Social Grange, *Proceedings*, MSS, August 3, 1892.

<sup>74</sup> Wood, *Farmers' Movements in Canada*, pp. 110-111; *Farmers' Voice*, I (October 13, 1888), 4; Glazer, "Patrons of Industry," pp. 185-187.

<sup>75</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (July 18, 1891), 457; Wood, *Farmers' Movements in Canada*, p. 110n.

<sup>76</sup> Glazer, "Patrons of Industry," p. 186; *Western Rural*, XXIX (July 18, 1891), 457; *ibid.*, XXX (February 27, 1892), 133.

local branches were formed in neighboring states and Canada. By 1891 it claimed 200,000 actives in 3,000 lodges scattered through seventeen states. The first local appeared in Illinois in 1889, and by July, 1891, it was reported to be in a flourishing condition in the counties along the Wisconsin border. McHenry, with forty-three associations, led the state, but the organization existed in at least six counties by December, 1891, when the state body was incorporated. The first state officers included George B. Richards, McHenry County, president, and D. A. Fuller, Winnebago County, secretary. Although some locals in northern Illinois counted as many as sixty members,<sup>77</sup> the Patrons of Industry was the smallest and least effective of the five agrarian organizations represented in the alliance movement in Illinois. Its members engaged in typical cooperative business enterprises and shared in the social and educational benefits of organization, but the society played almost no role in politics. However, its presence in the northern counties indicates that even in the dairy and livestock area most immune to economic distress, farmers were interested in organization when the opportunity presented itself.

By December, 1890, the alliance movement in Illinois included an estimated 2,175 local clubs with approximately 62,000 members, an average of one member to every four farms in the state. With almost 50 per cent more locals than the Grange claimed in January, 1875, when it was at the height of its influence,<sup>78</sup> the Alliance appeared to be a power to which businessmen and politicians would be forced to show due respect. Farm leaders were enthusiastic, believing that at last the rural community possessed a weapon which would allow it to regain its place in society, and each of the organizations proceeded to develop economic, educational, social, and political programs aimed at that goal.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, XXIX (July 18, 1891), 457; *ibid.*, XXIX (December 26, 1891), 827; Index to Corporations, 1886-1892, MSS (Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield), p. 361.

<sup>78</sup> Buck, *Granger Movement*, chart following p. 64; U.S. *Eleventh Census: Statistics of Agriculture*, pp. 204-206. Figures on organizational strength include 150 locals and 7,000 members of the National Farmers' Alliance, 1,650 lodges and 43,175 actives of the F.M.B.A., 160 locals and 3,400 members of the Southern Alliance, 196 subordinate bodies and 7,500 members of the Grange, and a few locals and members of the Patrons of Industry. For a map showing approximate location of organizational strength, see Fig. 2.

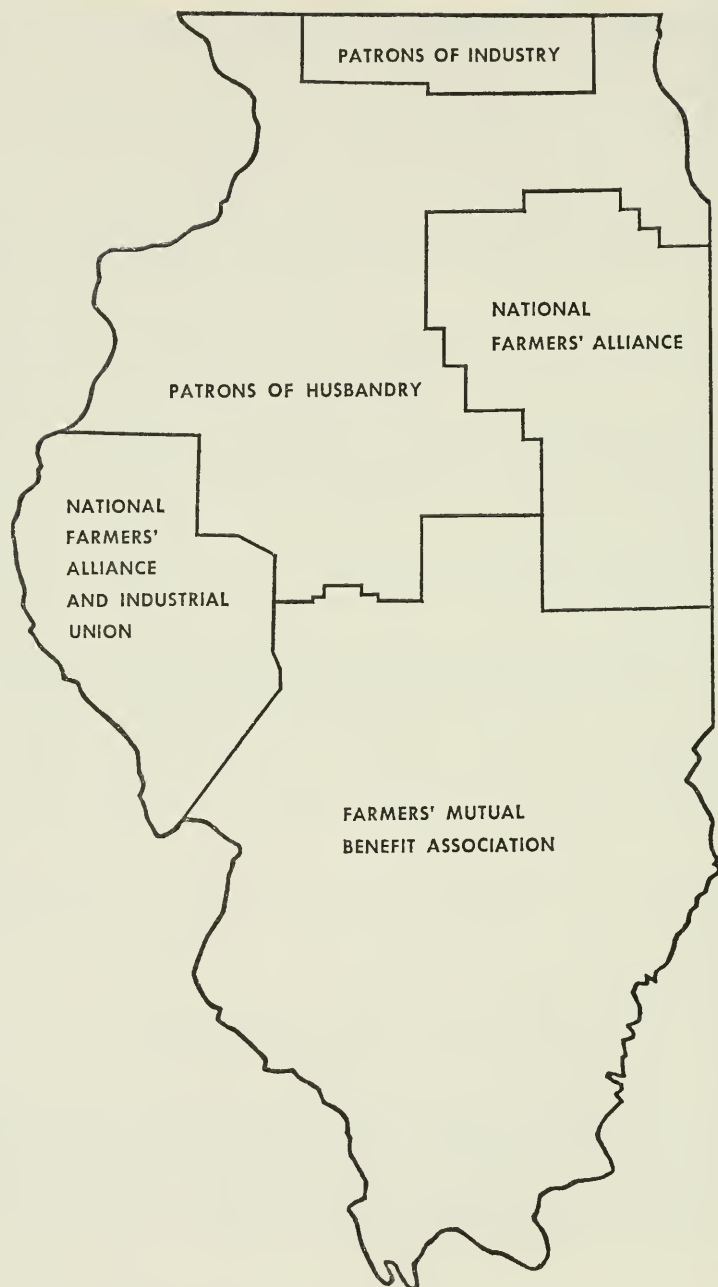


FIG. 2. Map showing the centers of organizational strength in Illinois. Because of overlapping, no completely accurate map can be drawn.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Objectives and Methods of the Alliance Movement

In accord with the philosophy of Milton George, all five associations in Illinois held it as a first principle that agriculture was the fundamental industry in the nation and that other elements of society depended upon it. Echoing George's view that the "farmer is the most important personage in the Republic," a leading Granger claimed, "Agriculture is the foundation upon which the business of the country rests. . . ." and the F.M.B.A. thought it universally admitted that "every profession and business . . . looks either directly or indirectly to the farmer for sustenance."<sup>1</sup> But widespread agricultural distress, combined with the rising status of urban life and the increasing tendency to picture the farmer as a simpleton who deserved his fate, indicated to many that instead of being the foundation of society, the farmer was rapidly becoming its mudsill. In these circumstances many farm leaders—most of whom accepted the Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian society—saw a prelude to the failure of democracy. Milton George thought that the ruin of Rome was being reworked in the United States, and Herman E. Taubeneck, a southern Illinois leader who spoke with more imagination than facts, claimed that the same causes that produced the French Revolution were undermining the American society.<sup>2</sup>

All farm leaders who expressed themselves shared George's conviction that the basic cause of their distress was the enactment of class laws by legislatures under the domination of wealthy interests. To them, organization and combination were the trends of the times, and the farmer, if he were to protect himself, must adopt similar tactics, not only in economic programs but also in politics. Therefore, the objectives of the alliance movement in Illinois differed

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<sup>1</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1890, p. 15; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *General Charter*, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> National Farmers' Alliance, *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting*, 1891, pp. 11-13; Herman E. Taubeneck to Everett W. Fish, April 9, 1892, Donnelly MSS.



radically from the theoretical approach of the early Grange by openly advocating the use of political organization to correct existing injustices. When in 1889 a prominent Granger observed that legislation could be enacted by only two means, either by the power of money or of public opinion, he expressed the keynote of alliance thought.<sup>3</sup> Since the farmer lacked the former, he was forced to mobilize the latter.

To most leaders in Illinois, the use of political power did not mean the formation of a farmers' party. Instead, until the middle of 1890, agricultural organizations in the state consistently followed George's dictum calling for nonpartisan action and directing farmers to work through existing parties. Everywhere, members of rural associations attempted to inform themselves on the issues of the day and displayed a new aggressive interest in the operations of their parties' machinery. In addition, agrarian spokesmen believed that important reforms could be accomplished by means of resolutions and petitions expressing the desires of the united country population. George set the pattern in his efforts to secure federal railroad regulation, and he designed the honorary alliance as a means to accomplish the same ends at a time when farmer apathy prevented effective organization. Therefore, by the adoption of resolutions and the drafting of petitions, each of the organizations in the state expressed its demands for national, state, and local legislation.

During the early and middle 1880's, positions taken by the groups tended to be general in nature, but by the late years of the decade farmers were expressing their opinions in no uncertain terms. The early state alliance in Illinois, since it was weak, limited itself to the general objectives of the National Farmers' Alliance. However, it played a leading role in the agitation calling for state enforcement of railroad laws which culminated in the farmers' convention in Springfield in March, 1882. There, the demands voiced by Alliance leaders resulted in a temporary improvement in relations between the agricultural groups and the carriers. The Illinois State Grange, during the first six years of the 1880's, was even more cautious and concerned itself with matters directly related to agriculture while studiously avoiding issues that might antagonize conservative members. In 1883, for example, the body requested Congress to take the necessary steps to control various diseases in animals, and in 1886, the association began a long campaign to secure state aid in the con-

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<sup>3</sup> *Albion Journal*, January 3, 1889, p. 1.

struction of better public roads.<sup>4</sup> By 1887, however, the group was devoting attention to more controversial matters. In the state convention of that year, members evaluated the new Interstate Commerce Act and concluded that it was inadequate; they also initiated the demand for state publication of school textbooks, and they vigorously denounced the State Board of Railroad and Warehouse Commissioners, considering it a tool of the roads.<sup>5</sup>

By 1889 and 1890 the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance, the F.M.B.A., the state Grange, and the newly-formed Illinois State Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union had developed comprehensive programs and formulated demands covering a wide range of topics, both state and national. As a general rule, the Grange was the most conservative association in the state. Between the resolutions of the F.M.B.A. and George's State Farmers' Alliance, there were few differences, while the Southern Alliance appeared to be the most radical order in Illinois.

On major national issues, the four largest farm orders in the state displayed considerable uniformity. Each called for free and unlimited coinage of silver, the use of the Australian ballot, and the direct election of United States senators. The F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance were more concerned with the money question and demanded in addition to free silver the abolition of the national banking system and the issuance by the government of sufficient currency to handle the needs of the country. The F.M.B.A. also asked that the electoral college be abolished and that federal judges be elected by the voters.

All organizations supported a graduated income tax and called for federal trust regulation. They expressed similar views on the land question, demanding that public land be retained for the use of farmers, that alien ownership be prohibited, and that grants of land not actually used by railroads and other corporations be returned to the government. The Homestead Act was praised, but the farmers asked that other legislation providing for the disposal of the public domain be repealed.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Decatur Daily Republican*, January 17, 1883, p. 4; *Albion Journal*, January 21, 1886, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, December 16, 1887, p. 4; *Prairie Farmer*, LIX (January 29, 1887), 73.

<sup>6</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1890, pp. 72-73; *Illinois State Journal*, December 12, 1890, p. 1, October 23, 1890, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (December 21, 1889), 816; *National Economist*, IV (November 8, 1890), 121; *Illinois*

There was no unanimity of opinion on the tariff and only slightly more on the matter of railroad control, although all groups recognized the need for some type of federal action. The Grange supported the principle of the tariff but wanted it to be shaped to aid farmers. Professing fear of competition in farm commodities from South America and Asia, the Grange called for protection but urged that goods which farmers purchased be placed on the free list. The Northern Alliance displayed the same tendency to let the ox gore the other fellow, but the Southern Alliance and the F.M.B.A. called for a downward revision of all schedules and seemed to be willing to accept free trade.<sup>7</sup>

On transportation, the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance showed the parenthood of Milton George by calling for strict government control or operation of all trunk lines, an immediate reduction of rates, and the development of a comprehensive system of water routes by the national government. The F.M.B.A. pressed for more effective government regulation without indicating what form it desired, while the Southern Alliance called militantly for governmental ownership of all major lines. The Grange, in its conservative role, observed that the people should have a greater voice in the management of the roads and congratulated the Interstate Commerce Commission on its work but indicated a fear of expanding government and suggested that perhaps the best answer lay in the development of internal waterways to furnish competition to the railroads.<sup>8</sup>

Besides the basic questions of money, land, transportation, tariff, and popular government, the various farm groups expressed their views on topics of less importance. For example, in 1889, the state Grange was among the organizations asking President Harrison to appoint a farmer as secretary of agriculture. The farm orders requested the census bureau to include mortgage statistics in its report for 1890. The Grange, a strong supporter of agricultural education, gave its approval of greater aid to the land-grant colleges and favored the passage of the second Morrill act. Some demands were quite unreasonable. For example, the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance, reflecting the teaching of Milton George who claimed that lawyer-politicians enacted needlessly complex and detailed laws, stated that the

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*State Register*, October 30, 1890, p. 5; *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 21, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, pp. 60-61; *Illinois State Journal*, December 12, 1890, p. 5; *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Illinois State Register*, October 30, 1890, p. 5; *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 21, 1889, p. 1; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, p. 57.

Supreme Court should be required to examine each new enactment and explain its meaning to the people.<sup>9</sup>

The farmers, in state conventions, also habitually indicated their approval or disapproval of legislation before Congress. An example showing the differences between groups was the attitude toward the Conger Compound Lard Bill and the Paddock Pure Food Bill. Both measures were results of long agitation against adulterated foods, and the Conger bill, supported by the hog raisers of Iowa and the National Farmers' Alliance, was designed to prevent the use of cottonseed oil in compound lard. The southern farmers, on the other hand, recognized that the measure would lead to lower prices for cottonseed so they denounced it as class legislation and supported, instead, the Paddock bill which concerned itself with a wider range of food products but lacked the taxing feature presented in the other bill. In Illinois the state Grange and the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance, representing the pork-producing areas in the central and northern districts, supported the Conger bill, but the state body of the Southern Alliance, true to its parent organization, urged the enactment of the Paddock bill. The F.M.B.A., less interested in hogs than the two associations having greatest strength in northern Illinois, joined with the Southern Alliance in favoring the Paddock proposal.<sup>10</sup>

The farm orders used the resolution and petition technique to outline and present their programs on the state level. The F.M.B.A., for example, demanded a thoroughgoing revision of the state taxing system so as to shift the burden to the wealthy. Specifically, the organization wanted assessment of property at its true cash value, a state income tax, and the abolishment of the State Board of Equalization, which the agricultural groups believed was business dominated. Spokesmen for the F.M.B.A. asked for state regulation of trusts, a reduction of the legal rate of interest from 8 to 6 per cent, regulation of stockyards charges, and reduction of freight and passenger rates. The order supported the old granger demand for a universal set of public school textbooks to be supplied by the state at cost, called for the election of railroad and warehouse commissioners as well as public grain inspectors, and advocated the use of funds de-

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (December 21, 1889), 816; *Western Rural*, XXVIII (December 20, 1890), 805.

<sup>10</sup> *National Economist*, IV (November 22, 1890), 152-153; *Illinois State Register*, October 30, 1890, p. 5; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1890, p. 28; Nixon, "Cleavage Within the Farmers' Alliance Movement," pp. 28-30; *Illinois State Journal*, December 12, 1890, p. 1.



rived from liquor license sales for the maintenance of county poor-houses and asylums. In company with other farm groups, the F.M.B.A. denounced the Chicago Board of Trade as a "den of thieves" and called for legislation prohibiting trading in futures of farm products, with imprisonment and fines as penalties.<sup>11</sup>

The political demands of other groups differed only in details from those expressed by the F.M.B.A. Concerning taxation, the Southern Alliance wanted to exclude mortgaged property from assessment and suggested that all mortgaged property be registered with the circuit clerk so that the extent of the evil might be easily ascertained. Reflecting its more advanced position on most issues, the Southern Alliance wanted to reduce the legal rate of interest to 4 per cent. The Northern Alliance felt that every state official should be elected by direct vote, but in 1889 the state Grange would have been satisfied if the governor had been willing to appoint farmers to agencies dealing with agriculture. The flat refusal of officials in Springfield to listen to rural suggestions soon forced the Grange to join its contemporaries on the issue. The Grange, in contrast to other organizations, expressed considerable interest in matters having no immediate economic or political significance. The order often helped the state agricultural college fight its legislative battles, and it encouraged the development of farmers' institutes under the sponsorship of the State Board of Agriculture. Something of the character of the Grange may be seen in its request that the state take steps to protect those game birds which helped to control harmful insects.<sup>12</sup>

While the political goals of the alliance movement were best expressed in the annual state meetings of the various organizations, grass roots meetings of local clubs also produced resolutions, petitions, and letters to legislators. The F.M.B.A. of Macon and Piatt counties adopted resolutions similar to those adopted later by the state body, while the Northern Alliance locals in Vermilion County repeated the demands voiced in the four major planks of the parent organization. The La Salle County Grange, locals of the National Farmers' Alliance in Bureau and Iroquois counties, and an F.M.B.A. lodge in Marshall County were only a few of the many such

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, October 23, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1890, p. 1; *National Economist*, IV (November 8, 1890), 121.

<sup>12</sup> *Illinois State Register*, October 30, 1890, p. 5; *Illinois State Journal*, December 12, 1890, p. 1; *Illinois State Grange, Proceedings*, 1889, pp. 55, 60-61; *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (December 21, 1889), 816.



groups which regularly informed their legislators of the farmers' needs. In neighborhood gatherings participants spent considerable time considering local matters. In many areas the "courthouse crowd" was belabored as vigorously as the railroads or the trusts, and farmers often felt that the only difference between a local politician and a United States senator was that the latter could steal more. Farmers in local club meetings commented on educational facilities available and, in the main, seemed to favor the maintenance of adequate schools, even at the expense of additional taxes. Prohibition was also a favorite topic, and although there is no evidence to indicate that all farmers were opposed to Demon Rum, the local groups which expressed themselves were in favor of limiting severely the sale of alcoholic beverages.<sup>13</sup>

The farm orders did not intend to limit their programs to resolutions and petitions outlining grievances and proposing remedies. Instead, each group hoped to use cooperative enterprises as a means of attacking the most immediate object of their wrath, the middlemen. While country merchants, machinery dealers, elevator operators, and insurance companies were only symbols of wealth and its power and activity against them failed to correct basic abuses, farmers were willing to accept any method or project which promised to raise prices for produce, lower operating costs, and give them a greater return for their labor. Drawing on precedents established during the 1870's and remembering the successes of the earlier granger movement, Milton George and other leaders continually stressed the value of cooperative buying and selling, mutual insurance, and neighborhood cooperation.

There were distinct stages in the development of cooperative business activity. Beginning with neighborhood projects, the enterprises eventually became national in scope. In local efforts members of subordinate bodies cooperated in community work, aided farmers suffering from illness or disaster, and united to acquire machinery too expensive for individual ownership. For example, alliance members in Champaign County cooperated in such seasonal tasks as corn shelling and helped neighbors construct new buildings, while farmers belonging to F.M.B.A. lodges in Edwards County united to prohibit trespassing and hunting on their lands.<sup>14</sup> Local granges pur-

<sup>13</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 9, 1890, p. 3; *Western Rural*, XXVII (April 20, 1889), 245.

<sup>14</sup> *Champaign County Gazette*, November 9, 1887, p. 1; *Albion Journal*, October 31, 1889, p. 4.

chased large machinery, such as threshers, corn shellers, and clover hullers, which members used cooperatively. The Grange, more than any other group, served as a medium for neighborhood aid. Each local and county organization had a committee on charity which assisted members in distress. Financial aid was occasionally extended and the committees regularly recruited other farmers to help those who were behind in their field work because of illness or other unavoidable difficulties.<sup>15</sup>

Such neighborhood cooperation, however, was secondary to the main object, the reduction of middlemen's profits. The F.M.B.A., since it originated in a similar venture, was especially interested in cooperative selling. Not only did members continue to band together to sell wheat and other small grain, but in some instances, they sold a neighborhood's entire production of wool by sealed bids, thereby securing substantially higher prices. Where businessmen were hostile, farmers soon discovered the value of the boycott. In one particular case, F.M.B.A. lodges resolved to sell no more clover seed at prices offered, and a subordinate grange in Edwards County formally established a boycott when grain buyers attempted to collect a fee for the use of bags utilized in transporting the crop from farms to country elevators.<sup>16</sup>

Paralleling cooperative selling was cooperative buying. A simple technique, widely used by the F.M.B.A., was the contract system. By this arrangement, merchants agreed to sell goods to members of locals at a fixed percentage above wholesale prices in return for the patronage of the entire group. Ordinarily, farmers considered a 10 per cent margin by businessmen as sufficient, but in many cases the committees appointed by locals to arrange contracts were able to secure better terms. Under the stress of competition and united farmer demands, merchants and local businessmen offered all types of goods and services, including groceries, drugs, dry goods, harness, binder twine, threshing, and blacksmithing at substantial savings.

The contract system, however, contained basic weaknesses. While it had the obvious advantage of requiring no financial risk by farmers, contracts were often hard to make and difficult to maintain. It was almost impossible to deliver the patronage of the entire contracting local, and merchants were hard pressed when independent farmers demanded the same terms and prices that were quoted to

<sup>15</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1896, pp. 59-60; Greene County Pomona Grange, *By-Laws*, pp. 4-5; Illinois State Grange, *By-Laws*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Albion Journal*, July 26, 1888, p. 4, April 25, 1889, p. 4.

members of an organization. Many merchants flatly refused to co-operate, not only because of a natural aversion to a system diminishing their profits but also because cooperating businessmen earned the bitter dislike of those who refused. In some cases wholesalers refused to deal with merchants who joined with the farmers.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the successful operation of the method required the auditing of the merchant's books, a task with which most farmers were completely unfamiliar and one that was certain to create misunderstandings and bitterness. Although many contracts were renewed repeatedly and farmers in some localities successfully boycotted whole towns when merchants refused to deal with them, the contract system remained an elementary means of cooperative buying and generally led to a more comprehensive type.<sup>18</sup>

The agency system was a second form of cooperative buying, used by all organizations. Locals, county groups, and state associations appointed representatives to arrange terms with wholesalers and manufacturers who agreed to sell their products at lower prices in return for larger orders. The state Grange maintained an agency in Chicago throughout the 1880's, and the early alliance locals were allowed to purchase through it. Milton George also stimulated such activity by arranging terms with leading Chicago stores and by establishing the "Economy Club" as an agency to sell goods to members at near wholesale prices. As the National Farmers' Alliance expanded in east-central Illinois, greater successes were recorded. A local in Champaign County bought all the coal and flour needed by its members and in one week purchased \$435 worth of machinery.<sup>19</sup> The F.M.B.A. used similar tactics. Lodges bought coal by the carload and bargained so effectively with machinery manufacturers that members could buy binders at one-third less than was charged farmers outside the group. Twine was also acquired directly from the manufacturer. Marion County farmers claimed they saved over \$2,000 in one season on purchases of it.<sup>20</sup>

As the organizations grew in size and as leaders gained more experience, they appointed state agents who were able to secure even

<sup>17</sup> *Centralia Daily Sentinel*, February 1, 1890, p. 2; Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, pp. 374-378.

<sup>18</sup> *Albion Journal*, January 10, 1889, p. 4; *Western Rural*, XXVIII (August 2, 1890), 484.

<sup>19</sup> *Western Rural*, XXII (January 19, 1884), 36; *Champaign County Gazette*, February 1, 1888, p. 5, March 28, 1888, p. 4, April 4, 1888, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Mt. Vernon Register*, March 5, 1890, p. 1; *National Economist*, II (November 16, 1889), 134.

better prices by placing larger orders. Although the agent of the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance displayed a complete line of machinery available through his office, its members did not use the state agency system as effectively as the Grangers did. A Normal, Illinois, firm supplied the members with nursery stock at wholesale prices, and well-known commercial outlets, including Montgomery Ward of Chicago and A. J. Child and Sons of St. Louis, offered lumber, hardware, and general merchandise. During 1890 the state Grange arranged the purchase of 95,000 pounds of twine, and the next year the amount was doubled. A Peoria manufacturer supplied a full line of farm machinery, as well as wagons, buggies, and harness, at savings of from 25 to 50 per cent. In 1891 John M. Thompson claimed that such activity saved members \$125,000 on lumber and machinery alone.<sup>21</sup>

The agency system worked well when used by a highly cohesive group or when the commodity to be purchased was not available in a number of different styles or brands. Although the state Grange strongly urged members to decide early in the year what type and make of equipment was desired, the individualism and personal preference of farmers limited business with manufacturers of machinery and handicapped relations with other concerns. Furthermore, the failure of members to take as much of a product as they had promised caused firms to refuse to extend arrangements and occasionally meant that the state Grange was caught between farmer and manufacturer. Finally, many of the larger concerns, especially the great farm implement manufacturers, refused to bypass their local retail outlets and would make no bargains with the farmers.

Farm-owned stores and other small businesses constituted a third type of cooperative activity popular with Illinois farmers. Although some of the grange stores which had been established in the 1870's were operating as late as 1887, it was the F.M.B.A. that excelled in the development of cooperatively-owned enterprises. The Southern Alliance recommended such work, but it accomplished little, and the National Farmers' Alliance, because of a much smaller membership, claimed fewer concerns than the F.M.B.A. The Patrons of Industry in Illinois apparently limited itself to more elementary forms of economic cooperation. Most of the stores operated on a modified Rochdale plan by which goods were sold at competitive

<sup>21</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, pp. 29, 34; *ibid.*, 1890, pp. 39-40; *ibid.*, 1891, pp. 48-50; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1891, pp. 40-41.



prices to any purchaser but net profits were distributed to shareholders as rebates in proportion to the value of goods purchased by each. The typical investment in a farmer-owned store amounted to \$5,000 which members of an organization in the neighborhood raised by purchasing \$10.00 shares. The matter of credit presented a problem secondary in difficulty only to that of securing managerial talent. Most farmers needed credit at various times during the year and to meet this problem, a few stores allowed each shareholder credit up to the value of his investment in the enterprise.<sup>22</sup>

Farmers' stores in considerable number first appeared in southern Illinois under F.M.B.A. control, but by 1888 they were appearing in the central part of the state, including one established by the National Farmers' Alliance members in Champaign County. Two years later such outlets were a common sight throughout the lower two-thirds of the state, and in southern Illinois critics claimed that they were so numerous that normal trade was almost wiped out. In some areas farmers were able to acquire practically every kind of merchandise through them. In Pana, Taylorville, and Moweaqua drygoods, grocery, hardware, and farm machinery stores flourished, and Blue Mound had both drygoods and grocery stores.<sup>23</sup> Marshall, Edinburg, Grayville, and Alton were only four of the other communities with such farmer enterprises.

The development of country stores led to the desire for farmer cooperatives operating on a wider scale. The result was the establishment of county exchanges, including a centrally-located market with branches in the smaller towns. Such concerns not only sold merchandise to farmers but also purchased their small produce, such as eggs, poultry, and butter. By early 1890 Washington, Hamilton, and Williamson counties had central exchanges operating under such agencies and in some cases allowed all organized farmers to patronize them in order to avoid duplication of effort.<sup>24</sup> The F.M.B.A. considered going even further in its cooperative ventures and, in the course of a series of meetings in 1889 and 1890, laid plans for the establishment of an Industrial Cooperative Society which would do all the wholesale buying for the local farmer-owned stores in the state and would serve as a market for the small produce re-

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Myrick, *How to Cooperate* (Orange Judd Company, New York, 1910), pp. 17, 25, 35; *Western Rural*, XXVIII (March 22, 1890), 181.

<sup>23</sup> *Champaign County Gazette*, February 8, 1888, p. 4; *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1890, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Index to Corporations, 1886-92, MSS, pp. 144-145; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, pp. 13-14.



ceived at the exchanges.<sup>25</sup> The plan proved to be too difficult to implement, however, and was not put into operation.

The farmers did not restrict their business ventures to the establishment of stores and supply centers. Elevator, flour mill, and creamery operators were resented as much as country merchants, and organized farmers established cooperative enterprises in these lines when they thought the commercial concerns were exploiting them. State legislation provided a guide for farmers wishing to establish businesses, providing for the incorporation of cooperatives for ninety-nine years and placing management in the hands of a five-member board of directors elected by the stockholders. In all, forty-four concerns were incorporated between 1880 and 1894,<sup>26</sup> but it is apparent that many farmer businesses flourished without bothering to secure legal status.

As early as 1881, locals of the National Farmers' Alliance operated creameries in the northern counties, and by 1884 at least two farmer enterprises, including an elevator, existed in Stephenson County. But it was the F.M.B.A. that was most energetic in the work. A majority of the incorporated firms operated in the southern half of the state, and a fair proportion of them was concerned with the handling of grain. At Cerro Gordo in Piatt County, there was an F.M.B.A. elevator and scale company with a capital stock of \$10,000. Farmers in Shelby County purchased a grist mill and did their own work. Another F.M.B.A. elevator existed in Jerseyville. A typical milling company announced as its purpose the operation of a general flour mill and the establishment of a market for other farm produce. Incorporated with a capital stock of \$10,000, the firm sold shares at \$10.00 each to eighty-two original shareholders. An elevator, established in 1890 at Williamsfield in Knox County, had a value of \$3,000 distributed among eighty-six farmers.<sup>27</sup> Members of the National Farmers' Alliance also devoted attention to grain-marketing concerns. Farmers near Ivesdale incorporated an elevator company in 1889 with a capital stock of \$2,000 consisting of eighty shares worth \$25.00 each. Other types of businesses estab-

<sup>25</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 5, 1890, p. 9; *Mt. Vernon Register*, December 18, 1889, p. 4, March 12, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 60-61; Index to Corporations, 1881-86, MSS, np.; *ibid.*, 1886-92, MSS, pp. 144-146; *ibid.*, 1892-96, MSS, np.

<sup>27</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (February 28, 1891), 137; *Illinois State Register*, May 6, 1891, p. 5; Charter of F.M.B.A. Milling Company, MSS, Box 552, No. 22483; Charter of Farmers' Elevator Company, MSS, Box 525, No. 20572 (Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield).

lished on similar principles included butter and cheese factories, poultry hatcheries, and, in at least one case, an F.M.B.A. local formed a cooperative bank.<sup>28</sup>

Illustrative of the temper of farmers were several projects which were never completed. Among these was a Farmers' Agricultural Implement Manufacturing Company, incorporated in 1890, which was expected to produce low-priced machinery for farmers and provide jobs for discontented laborers at the same time. Some farm leaders called for the establishment of a cooperatively owned mill to manufacture barbed wire.<sup>29</sup> The Illinois State Grange supported a plan proposed by the national body to secure from a trust company or other financial institution a loan sufficiently large to float the mortgaged indebtedness of all members at 3 or 4 per cent interest. Although John M. Thompson naively claimed that the \$200,000,000 required could be easily secured, nothing was accomplished. The Grange and the F.M.B.A. also devoted considerable attention to methods of exchanging products, such as fruit, between districts in the state or between the Middle West and the South, but the plans were never completed.<sup>30</sup>

The Grange and the F.M.B.A. used the facilities of the American Livestock Commission Company, one of the first cooperative livestock-selling agencies operating in a terminal market. Incorporated in Illinois in 1889, it handled stock in Chicago's Union Stockyards on a commission basis. By the terms of its charter, 65 per cent of the net earnings was to be divided among the stockholders in ratio to the amount of stock shipped by each while the remaining 35 per cent was to be divided according to the number of shares held. Success of the venture, however, was severely limited by opposition from independent traders and by faulty financing which led to its failure after expulsion from the Chicago market.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Charter of Farmers' Alliance Company, MSS, Box 494, No. 18310; Charter of the F.M.B.A. of Eldorado, MSS, Box 554, No. 22655 (Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield); *Oquawka Spectator*, June 4, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1890, p. 8; *Mt. Vernon Register*, July 23, 1890, p. 1; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 31, 1890, p. 4; Index to Corporations, 1886-92, MSS, p. 145; *Clinton Register*, May 16, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, December 9, 1891, p. 1; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1895, pp. 45-46; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, pp. 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Myrick, *How to Cooperate*, pp. 222-226; Shannon, *Farmer's Last Frontier*, pp. 336-337; Charter of American Livestock Commission Company, MSS, Box 483, No. 17452 (Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield); Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, pp. 13-14; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1891, pp. 48-50.

Similar to the American Livestock Commission Company, but dealing in grain as well as livestock, was the Illinois Exchange Union, established in 1891 by Michael D. Coffeen of Champaign County. Coffeen, who was the state business agent of the F.M.B.A. and later trade commissioner of the Illinois Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, owned a prosperous elevator and milling business which became the nucleus of the marketing organization. The firm was capitalized at \$50,000, a sum which was raised by seven stockholders. Coffeen, who apparently hoped that the concern would be profitable to himself as well as to the farmers, held almost 60 per cent of the total. Although all agricultural organizations in the state were invited to market produce through the firm, they gave it only limited support. A year after its formation, the Exchange Union was practically bankrupt.<sup>32</sup>

The F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance in Illinois also agreed to cooperate with a proposed nationwide business association known as the National Union Company. Conceived in 1890 by Charles W. Macune and Oswald Wilson, an alliance leader from Florida, the plan called for the establishment of a system of farm stores and exchanges operating throughout the country under uniform rules. Such an association would have the obvious advantage of size in bargaining with manufacturers and other suppliers while, at the same time, it would serve as a marketing agency for many farm commodities. Since the affair required substantial financial support, the sponsors turned to the National Cordage Company which agreed to provide the necessary funds in return for 8 per cent of the net profits. The concern, which was incorporated in 1891, intended to operate a store in every county containing participating farm or labor organizations. By the terms of the agreement, producers would select the store best suited to their needs, which the National Union Company would purchase, stock with goods, and operate, selling to members and nonmembers alike at the lowest competitive price. Persons affiliated with a cooperating farm or labor group were to receive semiannual rebates of 2 per cent on purchases from the concern. The balance of the net profits was to be divided between the state and national bodies of the orders adopting the plan.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History*, pp. 369-370; *Illinois State Register*, April 10, 1891, p. 6; Charter of Illinois Exchange Union, MSS, Box 546, No. 22084 (Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield); *Illinois State Grange, Proceedings*, 1891, pp. 48-50; *ibid.*, 1892, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> *National Economist*, VI (February 20, 1892), 354-355; *Illinois State Register*, November 19, 1891, p. 1; *Western Rural*, XXX (July 2, 1892), 419,

When the details of the project were disclosed, a controversy arose among farm leaders in Illinois. The connection with the National Cordage Company caused Milton George to denounce it as an effort by a monopolistic concern to destroy the independent country stores, while others went so far as to accuse those favoring it of having accepted bribes. The chief supporters of the plan were Michael D. Coffeen and John P. Stelle, who admitted that the project, if put into effect, would constitute a monopoly but claimed that it was proper to turn the weapons of business against middlemen. Writing in the *Progressive Farmer*, Stelle said, "But if this trust [the National Cordage Company] now comes in with its accumulated millions to aid the farmers in their struggle against oppressive commercial systems, must the aid be rejected simply because of the source whence it comes?" Accordingly, the F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance agreed to cooperate. The Grange, after careful study, seemed to favor participation, but the National Farmers' Alliance flatly refused. However, by the middle of 1892 it was apparent that the National Union Company was poorly conceived and lacked adequate financial support. In the Dakotas stores established by the concern enjoyed some success, but in Illinois the plan succeeded only in creating violent debate which materially harmed the agrarian movement. The subsequent collapse of the National Cordage Company completed the debacle.<sup>34</sup>

The insurance field provided another area for economic cooperation among farmers. Milton George claimed that the ordinary fire insurance company paid out only \$53.00 for every \$100.00 received as premiums, and he encouraged the development of farm mutuals as a means of preventing extortion.<sup>35</sup> As a result of earlier granger agitation, state legislation enacted during the 1870's provided the outlines for township and county mutuals. Farmer companies insured property for stated periods, charging in advance only a small fee for printing, secretary's expenses, and other necessities. When a loss occurred, each member was assessed an amount proportional to the value of his property covered. In some cases, to insure payment, participating farmers gave non-interest-bearing notes which the company held. Other mutuals charged entrance fees sufficiently large to accumulate a reserve, but most farmers opposed such a

<sup>34</sup> *National Economist*, VI (February 20, 1892), 355; *ibid.*, VII (May 14, 1892), 130; *ibid.*, VII (June 18, 1892), 211; *Decatur Daily Republican*, May 18, 1892, p. 3; *Western Rural*, XXXI (March 18, 1893), 168.

<sup>35</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, p. 49.



procedure, believing that it might lead to extravagance and waste.

Cooperative insurance companies, especially those formed by the Grange, were among the more successful business enterprises established by farm groups. As early as 1880 there were at least 103 farm mutuals in the state, Jo Daviess County being the leader with over \$700,000 worth of property coverage. As the new farm groups appeared, they urged the establishment of mutuals so the number of companies increased rapidly. In 1888 there were 161 cooperative fire companies, and in the following year 167 mutuals insured \$62,000,000 worth of property.<sup>36</sup> Originally organized on the township level and protecting only against fire losses, the companies came to include counties and districts while the coverage was enlarged to protect against windstorm and lightning. A typical company formed in southern Illinois in 1890 included seventy-four charter members, each limited to a maximum coverage of \$4,500, and policies amounting to \$50,000. But by that date, some were considerably larger and at least one had policies amounting to more than \$245,000. By 1892 there were 11 district, 36 county, and 134 township companies in Illinois with policies worth more than \$82,000,000. La Salle County alone had twelve companies and Macoupin, McHenry, and Winnebago each had five.<sup>37</sup>

Although farmers paid less attention to life insurance, cooperation enjoyed some success in that field. In 1882 the Illinois State Grange organized the Patrons' Aid Society, a life insurance company operating on the same principles as other mutuals, but as late as 1892 it included only 531 Grangers. The concern accumulated a reserve by charging a membership fee of from \$3.00 to \$12.00, depending upon the age of the applicant, and when a participant died, each member was assessed \$2.00. The Southern Alliance in Illinois utilized a similar plan, known as the Patrons' Aid Association and obviously modeled after the granger precedent, and the state body of the F.M.B.A. considered, but never completed, the formation of a life insurance company.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Yates, "Fifty Years in Illinois State Grange," p. 3; *Prairie Farmer*, LI (January 31, 1880), 35; American Mutual Alliance, *Directory of Mutual Companies in the United States*, 1955 (American Mutual Alliance, Chicago, 1955), pp. 10-19; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, p. 61; *ibid.*, 1890, pp. 62-63.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1892, pp. 50-51; *Albion Journal*, February 11, 1886, p. 4; *Decatur Daily Republican*, November 25, 1889, p. 1; *Mt. Vernon Register*, June 25, 1890, p. 4; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIV (January 30, 1892), 65.

<sup>38</sup> Yates, "Fifty Years in Illinois State Grange," p. 3; *National Economist*, VI (December 19, 1891), 215; *Centralia Daily Sentinel*, March 5, 1890, p. 2.



In every organization in the state, politics and business enterprises were supplemented by educational and social projects. Such activities were especially important on the local level, where they were closely connected and were designed to entertain as well as enlighten the members. Milton George, early in the alliance movement, urged that interest be maintained by the presentation of varied programs, including readings, essays, and music, and by inviting the farm wives who contributed to the sociability of the gatherings. In line with his suggestions, a typical alliance meeting consisted of songs, essays or short speeches, a discussion of some topic of interest to the members, a short play presented by the wives and children, and a business session.<sup>39</sup> The Northern Alliance locals also sponsored picnics and harvest festivals where speakers and music combined with abundant quantities of food to stimulate interest.

Alliance meetings ordinarily were held in the evenings, but local granges usually met during the day. The typical grange program was much like that of the Alliance, except that there was more attention paid to ritual and formalistic proceedings and to purely social activities. Since the ordinary grange meetings were all-day affairs and were usually accompanied by a dinner served by the wives, almost every session had many of the elements of a picnic. Some granges were remarkably well prepared for such activities. Many locals had their own halls which were adaptable to various functions. Some buildings measured as much as twenty-eight by forty-two feet, had two floors, and were equipped with kitchens, organs, rugs, and small libraries. County grange meetings, often two-day sessions, were also social occasions. The Grange, in fact, welcomed any excuse for a picnic; harvest feasts, strawberry festivals, and encampments were common events. One gathering adjourned only when the watermelons were "conspicuously absent."<sup>40</sup>

But the Grange did not allow such pleasant activities to overshadow the need for education. Almost every meeting included the reading of papers, debates, or the discussion of topics of common interest. The protective tariff, the practicability of sulky plows, poultry raising, dehorning of cattle, the need for better roads, free

<sup>39</sup> George, *Western Rural Yearbook*, pp. 140-142; *Western Rural*, XXX (December 3, 1892), 775; *Ottawa Free Trader*, January 17, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Albion Journal*, January 17, 1889, p. 4; Social Grange, Proceedings, MSS, August 3, 1892; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, May 30, 1884, August 17, 1887, May 28, 1890, May 29, 1890.

coinage of silver, and woman suffrage were typical subjects.<sup>41</sup> Other educational activities included inviting prominent men to speak at local or county meetings and the sponsoring of local fairs where the produce of the neighborhood as well as newer farmer methods and equipment were displayed. John M. Thompson and other leading Grangers were frequent speakers, but local bodies also heard outsiders, including Milton George, David W. Wood, and Senator Shelby M. Cullom. In 1886 the Grange sponsored at least five county fairs, but local displays were much more common. In such widely-separated towns as Mt. Carmel and Henry, they were annual events.<sup>42</sup> The Grange membership was also interested in taking control of the regular county fairs out of the hands of the "hossy set" and the sideshow promoters and converting them to true agricultural exhibitions so that farm families might attend them "with safety to limb and purse, and . . . derive some substantial benefit from them."<sup>43</sup> In 1892 the locals in Will and neighboring counties held a three-day chautauqua featuring educational and political orations. Among the speakers were Eugene Davenport of the state agricultural college and Hamlin Garland, the well-known author.<sup>44</sup>

The Grange was more active than any other group in developing community spirit and patriotism. Not only did locals engage in neighborhood aid, but spokesmen urged members to participate in the direction of local schools and suggested that it would not be a waste of time for all parents to spend an occasional afternoon in visiting the rural schools to supervise the education of the young. Some local granges assumed the responsibility for maintaining rural cemeteries and churches. Others decorated soldiers' graves, and most participated in some way in Fourth of July celebrations.

By their nature, the formal meetings of the F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance contained fewer social features than the Grange. Undoubtedly, the failure to include women as active participants in the F.M.B.A. contributed to the lack of interest in that direction.

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<sup>41</sup> *Albion Journal*, October 25, 1888, p. 4; Social Grange, Proceedings, MSS, February 3, 1892; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, May 27, 1885, May 29, 1891.

<sup>42</sup> *Western Rural*, XXVI (September 1, 1888), 553; *Prairie Farmer*, LX (December 15, 1888), 814; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (September 24, 1892), 4; *Albion Journal*, January 12, 1888, p. 3; *Henry Times*, October 2, 1890, p. 3; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1886, pp. 33-34.

<sup>43</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXI (September 7, 1889), 569.

<sup>44</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, VI (September 24, 1892), 4.

Wives of members established a ladies' guild which flourished in some areas, but the association made no provision for the women's presence in the official business of the order. Similarly, women had only a secondary role in the Southern Alliance although they were accepted as members. But the unofficial meetings of the organizations were much like those of the Grange and the Northern Alliance. Discussion of leading questions, short speeches, and dinners were interspaced between business sessions. Like the Grange, the F.M.B.A. was a regular sponsor of picnics. In some areas different organizations cooperated in such events. In Greene County, locals of the Grange and the Southern Alliance joined together to hold a picnic, although some members of the older group objected. In Edwards County, relations between the Grange and the F.M.B.A. were so friendly that a harvest feast was an annual occurrence. In other areas, the F.M.B.A. cooperated with the Knights of Labor.<sup>45</sup>

The F.M.B.A., in fact, seemed to enjoy picnics and barbecues more than any other group. Although an opposition paper claimed that "broken-down political cranks" usually appeared in large numbers, the F.M.B.A. seems to have spent almost as much time in eating, dancing, and other festivities as in discussing the causes of distress. An urban reporter, sent to southern Illinois to study the political implications of the agrarian movement, was astonished to see that at many meetings, "one of the greatest attractions was a dancing platform [which] began operations early in the day, [and continued] hour after hour, always on the same tune." He concluded that "dancing in southern Illinois is in some respects a matter of endurance."<sup>46</sup>

Although some F.M.B.A. meetings were followed by festivities until four in the morning and critics were certain that liquor was present in large quantities, the local gatherings also had educational features. Farmers discussed the care of fruit trees, the advantages of cooperative creameries, and the desirability of diversified agriculture as well as innumerable other topics. The F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance also sponsored local fairs where members competed for prizes. The southern group was aided in its educational program by the policy of the national organization which provided a series of

<sup>45</sup> Social Grange, Proceedings, MSS, September 16, 1891; Greene County Grange, Proceedings, MSS, August 21, 1891; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 5, 1887, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Mt. Vernon Register*, August 28, 1889, p. 4; *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1888, p. 2.

subject lessons concerning current problems. Furthermore, it regularly dispatched official lecturers on speaking tours through the state.<sup>47</sup> During 1890 and 1891 the four leading organizations sponsored great rallies or encampments, but the political aspects were more prominent than the social or educational features.

Contributing materially to the educational program and speaking for the discontented farmers were a number of reform papers. The group included both long-established agricultural magazines and a number of minor journals stimulated by the wave of agrarian unrest. Most farm leaders were convinced that the metropolitan papers were dominated by the moneyed interests and their political henchmen. According to George, their negative attitude had been a primary factor necessitating the formation of the National Farmers' Alliance, and John P. Stelle, speaking for the F.M.B.A., claimed that major urban newspapers and many farm journals simply ignored the pressing questions of the day or, even worse, echoed the machine politicians.<sup>48</sup>

The *Western Rural* was the most consistent supporter of the agrarian movement in Illinois. Although it was never the official journal of any group, it carried organizational news, advice, and encouragement during the fourteen years following the formation of the National Farmers' Alliance and was a voice respected by members of all associations. The *Prairie Farmer*, the oldest farm paper in Illinois, supported the movement after Milton George's role became less important, but it consistently favored the Grange and was less enthusiastic about other groups. A third journal which strongly supported agrarian organization was the *Farmers' Voice*, a Chicago paper supported financially by Montgomery Ward and Company. Established in 1888, it was the most militant of the three major journals, and under the editorship of Lester C. Hubbard, it came to be a leading spokesman for third-party action.

The most successful of the official journals was the *Progressive Farmer*. Supported by the largest order in Illinois and ably edited, it enjoyed a circulation and respect excelled by no other paper of its type. After 1892 it became increasingly Populist in its attitude, but until its collapse in 1896, it was the leading spokesman for agri-

<sup>47</sup> *Centralia Daily Sentinel*, February 1, 1890, p. 2, February 13, 1890, p. 1; *Illinois State Register*, August 20, 1890, p. 6; *White Hall Register*, August 7, 1891, p. 8; *Chicago Tribune*, August 25, 1890, p. 3; *National Economist*, V (June 13, 1891), 197.

<sup>48</sup> *National Economist*, IV (March 14, 1891), 418; National Farmers' Alliance, *History*, p. 1.



cultural interests in southern Illinois.<sup>49</sup> The Illinois State Grange possessed an official journal, known as the *Grange News*, which was established in 1886 and published at Normal by A. B. Ogle. Although it was adopted by neighboring state granges, financial difficulties resulting from lack of support forced Ogle to resign in 1891, and Alexander Keady, a dedicated Granger from Peoria County, succeeded him. The paper struggled along until 1896, apparently published at a loss by Keady and aided materially by direct subsidies from the state Grange.<sup>50</sup> The official journal of the Illinois Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union enjoyed even less success. Founded in October, 1890, the *Alliance Free Lance* existed for only one year. Although T. D. Hinckley, who had edited a Kentucky reform paper for several months, succeeded Fred G. Blood as editor in April, 1891, the journal's career came to an end in November, 1891, when the St. Louis *Monitor* absorbed it.<sup>51</sup> Many members of the organization, however, subscribed to the *National Economist*, the official voice of the national body of the Southern Alliance.

Numerous minor papers, stimulated by the wave of discontent, added their voices to the demand for reform. Included in the group were the Quincy *Journal of Industry*, the Shelbyville *Our Best Words*, the Fayette County *Farmers' Statesman*, and the Fairfield *Farmers' and Laborers' Gazette* which spoke for the whole group when it proclaimed itself "the protector of the farmer and the advocate of reform." Like most weeklies of the period, the minor reform papers copied freely from better-known journals, operated on a shoestring, and were short lived, but their loud and insistent voices undoubtedly contributed materially to the enlightenment of rural readers. Moreover, many local newspapers, faced by new competition, displayed a greater willingness to supplement stale political news with material pertaining to the farm and rural home.

<sup>49</sup> Eliza Coker Stelle, Diary, MSS, January 1, 1897, January 1, 1898.

<sup>50</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, p. 35; *ibid.*, 1891, p. 54; *ibid.*, 1896, pp. 42-43.

<sup>51</sup> *Illinois State Register*, October 29, 1890, p. 1; *National Economist*, IV (January 24, 1891), 305; *ibid.*, V (April 18, 1891), 67; *ibid.*, VI (November 14, 1891), 129; T. D. Hinckley to Ignatius Donnelly, March 8, 1893, Donnelly MSS.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# The Question of Independent Political Action and the Election of 1890

Cooperative, educational, and social activities of agricultural organizations gave temporary relief from middlemen, defined the nature of rural difficulties, and improved country life, but such tactics failed to solve basic problems facing farmers. Since agrarian leaders held unjust laws responsible for harmful conditions, they believed that only through political action could their class correct fundamental injustices. The decision to use political power, however, raised a most significant question. How could farmers best exercise their influence in legislative halls? The platforms, demands, resolutions, and petitions adopted by every level of the agrarian organizations outlined the desires of members, but legislators were remarkably unimpressed by such expressions. At the same time, the memories of early grange activities in the political field were so unpleasant that they served as guideposts for the more conservative agrarian leaders who maintained that third-party action inevitably led to disintegration and collapse of the agricultural organizations engaging in it. The result was a compromise as the alliance movement in Illinois tried to steer a middle course between pious expressions of hope on one hand and independent action on the other.

Alliance political philosophy, as formulated by Milton George, called for the election by nonpartisan methods of farmers or men pledged to rural objectives in sufficient numbers to give agricultural elements their fair proportional representation. Following this principle, rural leaders continually called on farmers to participate in the caucuses and conventions of their parties so that nominees might be more in accordance with agrarian views. The F.M.B.A. proclaimed, "We do not expect to correct these evils [agricultural abuses] . . . by forming a new political party . . . but by educating the farmers . . . to use their right of suffrage for men who possess the true qualifications for office,"<sup>1</sup> and the state Grange expressed

<sup>1</sup> *National Economist*, II (November 16, 1889), 135.

similar sentiments. Since such political methods required the development of a true independent spirit among farmers, some agrarian organizations in Illinois urged their members to drop their old political affiliations and to vote not as Democrats or Republicans but as farmers. In this vein, a grange spokesman denounced "idolatry of party" as a factor detrimental to rural elements while John P. Stelle called on farmers to be "free and independent" in their choice of candidates. Significantly, the leading voice of the F.M.B.A. emphasized that his group was not trying to organize a new party but was only attempting to overthrow the "bosses."<sup>2</sup>

The nonpartisan method permitted the use of various forms of political pressure. As early as 1886, the National Farmers' Alliance appointed a committee to present the organization's program to the state legislature, and two years later the state Grange adopted similar lobbying tactics. When state lawmakers failed to act, the Grange compiled a list of legislators who opposed needed farm measures and asked that it be displayed in every grange, alliance, and F.M.B.A. hall in the state.<sup>3</sup> The Grange, not being content to advocate the naming of farmers to state agencies, selected one of its members and presented his name to Governor Joseph W. Fifer as a candidate for the Board of Railroad and Warehouse Commissioners. When Fifer rejected the farmer, the state Grange passed a censure resolution and announced its refusal to support the Republican governor in his bid for reelection.<sup>4</sup> The F.M.B.A. agreed to reject any candidate who, during his earlier career, had failed to work for the farmers' interests and bluntly warned the old parties that failure to placate farmers might lead to independent action. In some areas the F.M.B.A. and the Northern Alliance drafted questions such as, "Are you in favor of amending the laws so that all capital will have its just proportion of taxation?" which they put to candidates, at the same time proclaiming their refusal to support those who answered in the negative.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1889, p. 23; *National Economist*, III (September 13, 1890), 423; *ibid.*, IV (October 18, 1890), 80; *Farmers' Voice*, I (July 14, 1888), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LX (December 22, 1888), 830; *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1886, p. 10; *Western Rural*, XXVII (October 26, 1889), 681.

<sup>4</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, II (January 19, 1889), 9; *Albion Journal*, December 19, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *National Economist*, III (May 10, 1890), 128; *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1890, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (July 19, 1890), 449; *Illinois State Register*, July 9, 1890, p. 5.

Throughout the 1880's, however, there were leaders who tried to maintain the third-party tradition born a decade earlier. After the collapse of the Illinois State Farmers' Association in 1877, such leaders, to a large degree, lacked followers. Although they changed their party label from National Greenback to Greenback-Labor to Anti-Monopoly, relative prosperity based on favorable economic conditions prohibited the development of appreciable strength. James B. Weaver received 26,358 votes in Illinois in 1880, but four years later Benjamin F. Butler found only 10,910 supporters. As the appeal of paper money faded, independency in Illinois turned to labor elements. The convention which formed the Anti-Monopoly party in Chicago, July 4, 1883, ignored the Farmers' Alliance, and four years later the rise of the Union Labor Party illustrated the effort between 1884 and 1888 to organize radical elements under labor leadership.<sup>6</sup>

In Illinois the Haymarket disaster of 1886 caused labor to turn to politics, and a local party in Chicago elected one state senator and eight representatives that year. In the remainder of the state, isolated groups of laborers and farmers joined together to make nominations on the senatorial district and county levels, but important rural support was conspicuously lacking. Only one assemblyman from the area outside Cook County was elected, and he represented a labor constituency in St. Clair County.<sup>7</sup> Prompted by the showing in Chicago, a prolabor journal, the *Express*, called a meeting where delegates established February 22, 1887, as a date for a convention to meet in Cincinnati and form a new party. The result was the National Union Labor party, but the dominant elements were rural and former Greenbackers assumed control. There were clear indications that labor resented its treatment at the hands of the farmers, and when Alson J. Streeter, an agrarian liberal, was nominated for President, a weak showing was assured.<sup>8</sup>

The Union Labor party nominated a state ticket in Illinois, but the candidate for governor received almost 1,100 fewer votes than the 7,534 given Streeter and only one-third as many as the Prohibi-

<sup>6</sup> McKee, *National Conventions and Platforms*, pp. 198, 229; *Western Rural*, XXI (July 14, 1883), 226; Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War* (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, 1916), p. 205.

<sup>7</sup> *Blue Book of the State of Illinois*, 1909 (Springfield, 1909), pp. 294-296; *Illinois State Register*, August 19, 1886, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> John R. Commons and others, *The History of Labour in the United States* (4 vols., The Macmillan Company, New York, 1918-35), II, 464-469; *Chicago Tribune*, February 23, 1887, p. 1, February 24, 1887, p. 2.

tion candidate for governor polled. Since the candidate was selected and the platform was drafted to appeal to discontented farmers, the lack of a state-wide independent attitude was clearly apparent.<sup>9</sup> Even on the congressional-district and local levels, where the specter of farmer political action disturbed old party politicians and caused them to make nominations with an eye for rural support, agricultural groups failed to repudiate old political ties. In such areas as Champaign County, where the Republicans were usually supreme, the Democrats hoped for aid from the Alliance, and in southern Illinois both parties attempted to placate discontented groups by naming candidates who were identified as being favorable to agriculture. In the nineteenth congressional district, the Republicans selected an F.M.B.A. member as their nominee, while in the twentieth district the Democrats endorsed the candidate of the Union Labor party. In the eighteenth district the farmer-labor coalition placed an independent in the race, and in numerous areas it drew up county and township tickets. But when the votes were counted, it was found that not only had no independent been elected but the candidates endorsed by an old party in an effort to upset a favorite had similarly failed.<sup>10</sup> When victories on the local level also failed to materialize, the Union Labor party ceased to exist as a political entity.

The failure of the Union Labor party to attract farmers in substantial numbers may be traced to two causes. First, economic conditions had not yet deteriorated to the point at which normally conservative farmers would turn from their old parties. Second, the failure of the farmer-labor coalition, both in 1888 and during the Populist period, stemmed from the refusal by farmers to be identified with the laboring man. While agricultural leaders talked in glowing terms of the "producer," a collective term which was understood to include both farmer and laborer, they were often hostile toward the working man when specific issues were discussed. Milton George spoke for many Illinois farmers when he said that labor organizations were detrimental to agriculture, that some of their doctrines were "wild theories," and that strikes were "folly."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois at the General Election held November 6, 1888* (Springfield, 1889), pp. 3-6; *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 1888, p. 7, April 27, 1888, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois... November 6, 1888*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, p. 43; *Western Rural*, XXV (April 16, 1887), 252; *ibid.*, XXV (July 9, 1887), 444.

Nor was the *Western Rural* the only agricultural paper to denounce labor unions and their activities. The *Prairie Farmer* labeled them as "trusts" and claimed that, by striking, they were resorting to "pure robbery." Although the conservatism of the two leading farm journals in Illinois caused Ignatius Donnelly to brand their type as "carrot improvement" papers, their influence was undeniable.<sup>12</sup> To many ordinary farmers, such incidents as the Haymarket affair confirmed the view that labor unions were radical concerns, bent on destruction and a violent overturn of society. Milton George may again be taken as an example. He claimed that the anarchist leaders were ignorant, lazy, and unprincipled scoundrels who, by appealing to a shiftless crowd, aroused "the worst passions of the human heart" and converted the whole group into a "murderous mob." He concluded that the anarchist leaders should be promptly hanged.<sup>13</sup>

The failure in 1888 did not discourage the confirmed third-party advocates in Illinois, but it did cause them to alter their tactics. Although some were remarkably naive and continued to call for common action by such diverse groups as the Farmers' Alliances, Knights of Labor, American Federation of Labor, Nationalists, single tax advocates, Christian socialists, voluntary and state socialists, and "honest" Democrats and Republicans, the responsible independent leaders turned increasingly to farmers and avoided any suggestion of rural-urban cooperation. During 1889 and 1890 such agricultural spokesmen as Alson J. Streeter, T. D. Hinckley, George W. Wickline, and James Cockrell conducted a propagandizing campaign in which they pointed to the corruption in both existing parties, ridiculed the nonpartisan method, and called militantly for the establishment of a true farmer party. Their cause in Illinois was greatly strengthened by the appearance of the *Farmers' Voice*, which soon adopted a militant third-party line. In 1888 its editor, Lester C. Hubbard, claimed that the *Voice* was politically independent, but in the election of that year it obviously favored Streeter. Four months later, Hubbard proclaimed, "Our country's salvation demands that a great farmers' party be organized *at once*."<sup>14</sup>

In 1889 a special election to fill a vacancy caused by the death of Richard W. Townshend, representative from the nineteenth con-

<sup>12</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LX (April 14, 1888), 235; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (March 19, 1892), 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Western Rural*, XXV (March 26, 1887), 202; *ibid.*, XXV (August 13, 1887), 526.

<sup>14</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, I (October 13, 1888), 8; *ibid.*, II (March 23, 1889), 8.



gressional district, illustrated the division among Illinois farm leaders on the question of political action. Since the nineteenth district, which included eight southern Illinois counties and the center of F.M.B.A. strength, was normally Democratic, the Republicans seriously considered nominating John P. Stelle in an attempt to defeat their opponent. When their congressional convention met, however, the party bosses prevailed, and they selected Thomas Ridgway, a Gallatin County lawyer wholly unattractive to agricultural groups.<sup>15</sup> The Democrats, in the meantime, were supremely confident and, without bothering to consider rural interests, picked James R. Williams, a lawyer-politician from White County. The conduct of the Democrats and Republicans convinced independents that they could expect little from either old party and that a third candidate was a necessity. Accordingly, they induced Stelle to make the race as an independent, believing that F.M.B.A. members would support him in large numbers. In the election, however, Stelle received only 2,388 votes or less than 9 per cent of the total while Williams defeated Ridgway by over 4,000 ballots, a larger plurality than Townshend received a year earlier.<sup>16</sup> To the advocates of non-partisanship, the lesson was simple. They were certain that the election proved the uselessness of running an independent and that the only answer lay in farm domination of the existing parties' caucuses and conventions. The independents interpreted the results differently. To them, the election showed that the old parties were so corrupt that reform through them was out of the question and that if farmers were to improve their conditions, it would be necessary to act through the medium of a new political organization.

The election of 1890, occurring at a time when farm organizations in the state were rapidly increasing in strength, gave the two groups an opportunity to test further their theories. Since the contest was without the emotionalism created by a presidential race, the advocates of nonpartisan action as well as the independents felt that the opportunities for an impressive showing, as with the Greenbackers of 1878, were greatly improved. In the course of the year every county would choose new officers, and there would be significant state elections as well. Governor Fifer was secure in his office until 1892, but the voters were to select a new state treasurer, a superintendent of public instruction, and a board of trustees for the state

<sup>15</sup> *Albion Journal*, April 18, 1889, p. 1, May 9, 1889, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, May 16, 1889, p. 1, December 5, 1889, p. 1; *Official Vote of the State of Illinois . . . November 6, 1888*, p. 26.

university. In the fifty-one senatorial districts the senators in the odd-numbered districts were up for election as well as three assemblymen in each constituency. Furthermore, there were contests in each of the twenty congressional districts, and the state legislature, in the early months of 1891, was to choose a senator to fill the chair occupied by Charles B. Farwell.<sup>17</sup>

Although the three older farm orders in Illinois had repeatedly emphasized their nonpartisan position, many of the conservative leaders believed that they should adopt a common policy concerning the approaching election. Such unity would not only give them greater influence with the old parties, but conservatives believed that it would prevent independents from carrying out any third-party program. Accordingly, John M. Thompson, master of the state Grange, invited the F.M.B.A. and the Farmers' Alliance as well as the Knights of Labor to send delegates to a convention at Springfield, May 2, 1890, where plans for cooperation could be drafted. Thirty delegates, including the most prominent members of each order and supporters of both nonpartisan and independent action, appeared. Among the conservatives were Cicero J. Lindley, president of the Illinois F.M.B.A., Edward S. Wilson, member of the board of trustees of the F.M.B.A. from Olney, Albert E. Brunson, president of the State Farmers' Alliance, George Ball, prominent Granger from Macoupin County, and Thompson. Representatives of the independent position who came to fight for their views included Alson J. Streeter, widely recognized as the leading third-party advocate in Illinois, George W. Wickline, an F.M.B.A. member from Washington County with distinct third-party tendencies, John Lindsey of the Knights of Labor, and Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, state secretary of the Farmers' Alliance.<sup>18</sup>

After considerable discussion and in the face of mutual jealousies, a committee on permanent organization succeeded in formulating a plan of union. It established a joint association known as the Farmers' and Laborers' Conference in which component groups were represented in proportion to their membership. A president and a general secretary were elected for one-year terms, and each organization was represented in the executive committee by a vice-president. After the outline of the new union was adopted, the

<sup>17</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Illinois State Register*, April 27, 1890, p. 1, May 2, 1890, p. 1, May 3, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, April 30, 1890, p. 4; Alfred W. Newcombe, "Alson J. Streeter, an Agrarian Liberal," *Illinois State Historical Society, Journal*, XXXIX (March, 1946), 88.

delegates elected John M. Thompson, president, and Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, secretary.<sup>19</sup>

The delegates hoped that the merger would stimulate state-wide cooperative enterprises, but the basic objective remained political unity. The F.M.B.A. included a majority of the organized farmers in the state so its attitude was the determining factor in any position taken by the new association. Its delegation at Springfield was led by Cicero J. Lindley who was not only a strong Republican but also an announced candidate for his party's nomination for state treasurer. Therefore, when the delegation met on the eve of the Springfield meeting, the members decided to oppose any move to name a farmers' ticket. Other conservatives joined with Lindley, and the convention resolved that each member of the four organizations would be a "missionary" within his own party and, by taking an active part in the caucuses and conventions, work for the nomination on all levels of men favorable to agriculture. Furthermore, the delegates categorically rejected third-party action and stated only that they would insist that all candidates who received farmer support publicly pledge themselves to work for demands enumerated by the farm orders in their state meetings.<sup>20</sup>

The independents were outraged with the nonpartisan position taken at Springfield. Claiming that the convention was manipulated by the old parties to prevent effective farmer activity, the *Farmers' Voice* called for agricultural organizations to repudiate the decisions reached. The independents were especially bitter with Lindley, who, they claimed, had all the "aristocratic aroma and dainty earmarks of a Republican machine" politician and who failed to recognize that the agriculture organizational movement was not a "Farmers' Picnic Association."<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, spokesmen for the Democrats and Republicans professed fear that the opposition would swallow the newly-formed confederation. Charges were freely made that Lindley was trying to convert the Farmers' and Laborers' Conference into an adjunct of the Republican party while Republicans claimed that Edward S. Wilson was attempting to use the confederation to secure united farm support in his bid for the Democratic nomination for state treasurer. So common did the attacks on Lindley become that the F.M.B.A. was prompted to adopt

<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, May 3, 1890, p. 2; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 21; *Illinois State Register*, May 3, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 1890, p. 3; *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (May 10, 1890), 296.

<sup>21</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, III (May 3, 1890), 9-10; *ibid.*, III (May 10, 1890), 9.

a resolution expressing the organization's faith in its president. At the same time, the refusal of the confederation to endorse Wilson quieted Republican fears.

Although three agricultural organizations in the state, in joint resolution, pledged that the orders would not engage in independent activity, there was no method by which the associations could control their members. Even the conservatives admitted that they could not speak for the local groups, and as early as April, 1890, Lindley acknowledged that farmers would nominate candidates for the state legislature. The rapid growth of the F.M.B.A. as well as other organizations during 1889 and the early months of 1890, the militant calls for independent action by Alson J. Streeter, the "grand old man" to many Illinois farmers, and the violent attacks by independents on the old parties indicated that the agricultural interests would play an important and perhaps decisive role in the coming election. Meanwhile, the presence of over 50,000 organized farmers convinced many old-party politicians that wisdom required some consideration of agrarian interests.

The power of organized farmers displayed itself in the Democratic state convention which met in Springfield, June 4, 1890, to adopt a platform and name candidates for state offices. Edward S. Wilson sought the nomination for treasurer, and supported overwhelmingly by farmer delegates from the southern two-thirds of the state, he defeated the Cook County choice, William Fitzgerald.<sup>22</sup> The Democrats, in fact, openly courted the farmers. Recognizing agrarian discontent as a force which could sweep Democrats into office, they adopted a platform which could have been formulated by the farmers themselves. It included demands for the direct election of railroad and warehouse commissioners, state distribution of a uniform series of textbooks, revision of the taxing system and changes in the state board of equalization, free coinage of silver, and the adoption of the Australian ballot. Finally, the Democrats took the almost unprecedented step of nominating, in a state convention, a candidate for United States senator, John M. Palmer.<sup>23</sup>

The Republicans were considerably less impressed with the temper of the farmers. Overlooking the significance of the Demo-

<sup>22</sup> *Illinois State Register*, June 5, 1890, p. 1; Edward S. Wilson to George W. Wall, March 10, 1890, Wall MSS (Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield).

<sup>23</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, June 5, 1890, pp. 1, 4; George T. Palmer, *A Conscientious Turncoat: The Story of John M. Palmer, 1817-1900* (Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1941), pp. 262-263.



cratic convention and operating in a fool's paradise, the Republicans began their state campaign in the time-honored manner; party bosses dictated the candidates and filled the platform with little but platitudes. Cicero J. Lindley, a Bond County politician of long standing, sought the nomination for state treasurer, and he began by appealing to John R. Tanner, Republican leader of southern Illinois, for support. Tanner was cool to the idea, and when Lindley indicated that he did not intend to wear a collar, he destroyed his chances. Accordingly, when the convention met in Springfield, June 24, 1890, the delegates ignored Lindley's importance as president of the Illinois F.M.B.A. and offered Franz Amberg, a little-known Chicago politician, to the voters. The Republicans later tried to placate southern Illinois farmers by allowing Lindley to be nominated for Congress in the eighteenth district, but in their platform they paid scant attention to agrarian demands, and they made a major error in failing to name a senatorial candidate to oppose Palmer.<sup>24</sup>

As had been expected, many farmers ignored the stand taken by the Farmers' and Laborers' Conference and entered aggressively into the congressional races. Most activity occurred in southern and east-central Illinois where the F.M.B.A. claimed its greatest strength. In the twentieth district, farmers and coal miners named a candidate, L. L. Lawrence, while in the nineteenth, John P. Stelle declined a nomination tendered by reform elements since it was apparent that the F.M.B.A. membership supported James R. Williams, the incumbent. In the eighteenth district, the Democrats renamed William S. Forman, a weak candidate who had won by only 26 votes in 1888. The Republicans, therefore, were confident of success when they selected Lindley as their nominee since they were certain that he would be able to attract many Democratic farmers.<sup>25</sup> Both old parties ignored the farmers in the seventeenth district, but the F.M.B.A. made its own selection, Edward Roessler, a Shelby County farmer and an early member of the Union Labor party. In the sixteenth district, the F.M.B.A. also nominated a candidate, John D. Reeder, a Methodist minister from Newton who was reputed to be able to "outpray any other fellow who ever hunted the Devil."

<sup>24</sup> Clarence R. Paul to Shelby M. Cullom, July 1, 1890, Cullom MSS (Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield); *Chicago Tribune*, June 25, 1890, pp. 1, 2, September 2, 1890, p. 5; *Illinois State Register*, June 25, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Albion Journal*, August 28, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, October 14, 1890, p. 1, September 2, 1890, p. 5, October 23, 1890, p. 1.



Since Reeder was a lifelong Republican, that party endorsed him in an effort to defeat incumbent George W. Fithian.<sup>26</sup>

In the fifteenth district, in east-central Illinois, a group representing the Grange, Knights of Labor, Prohibitionists, F.M.B.A., National Farmers' Alliance, and local miners nominated Jesse Harper, a former Greenbacker, Union Labor party campaigner, and labor agitator. Several of the farmer groups in the area, however, announced their refusal to support a confirmed radical, and when the Democrats apparently divided the reform vote by nominating Samuel T. Busey of Champaign County, a Civil War veteran and popular mayor of Urbana, the Republicans thought that Joseph G. Cannon was safe.<sup>27</sup> In the fourteenth district, farmers took no official position but favored Owen Scott, the Democrat. The F.M.B.A. endorsed the Republican, Jesse Hanon, who opposed William M. Springer in the thirteenth district while in the twelfth, the organization adopted as its candidate, Scott Wike, the Democratic incumbent.<sup>28</sup> The farmers of northern Illinois made concerted efforts in only two constituencies, the sixth and the tenth. In the former, they hoped to upset Robert R. Hitt, a Republican, with Andrew Ashton, a wealthy Rockford merchant who ran for Congress in 1874 with granger support. Six weeks after his selection, the Democrats and Prohibitionists endorsed Ashton. In the tenth district, delegates representing the Northern Alliance, the Grange, and the Knights of Labor nominated Joseph S. Barnum, editor of the Princeville *Telephone*, as an independent.<sup>29</sup>

In the contests for seats in the state legislature, the political activities of the rural organizations closely followed the pattern of the congressional campaign. Greatest interest developed in the F.M.B.A. strongholds in southern and east-central sections of the state, although members of the National Farmers' Alliance displayed an independent spirit in isolated areas farther north. In all, farmers nominated five candidates for state senator. Two of them represented the forty-third and forty-fifth districts in southern Illinois

<sup>26</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, April 22, 1888, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, August 8, 1890, p. 2, October 14, 1890, p. 1; *Illinois State Register*, August 12, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, July 16, 1890, p. 4; Alexander C. Barton, *The Life of Col. Jesse Harper* (M. A. Donahue and Company, Chicago, 1904), pp. 11, 166; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 20, 1890, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1890, p. 2, October 18, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 10, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, October 14, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Rockford Daily Register*, July 18, 1890, p. 2; *Farmers' Voice*, III (August 30, 1890), pp. 9-10; *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1890, p. 5.

while two others were from the thirty-first and thirty-third senatorial constituencies in the central and east-central sections of the state. A final candidate represented the twenty-fifth district in north-central Illinois.<sup>30</sup> For assemblymen, the F.M.B.A. named ten candidates, and the National Farmers' Alliance selected three. In two constituencies the farmers nominated two delegates, but in nine others they contented themselves with single candidates.<sup>31</sup> In addition, there were numerous instances where members of farm organizations endorsed candidates of one of the old parties in an effort to secure credit for a victory.

On the local level there was also widespread activity. Stemming primarily from the belief that courthouse politicians and township supervisors were corrupt and needlessly extravagant with the taxpayers' money, the farmers placed county and township tickets in the field. By September, 1890, there were 24 counties with rural candidates, a majority of them in southern Illinois. Farmers were more hesitant in central and northern sections of the state. The Douglas County assembly of the F.M.B.A. decided against independent activity, but the members passed a resolution condemning any candidate who supported the McKinley bill. In Piatt County, farmers refused to select contestants but decided to vote for the "best" man in either of the old parties. At the same time, they drafted a series of questions which favored candidates were required to answer in the affirmative.<sup>32</sup> But even in certain areas of central Illinois, rural elements followed the practice of their southern neighbors and selected nominees in such counties as Christian, Clark, Shelby, and Montgomery.

As the campaign progressed, it became apparent that the rural vote might well be the determining factor in the election. The educational programs of the agricultural organizations combined with increasingly hard times made farmers, independent and non-independent alike, acutely aware of the need for reform. Determined to capitalize on a situation which promised change, they organized a schoolhouse campaign throughout the southern two-thirds of the state. Meanwhile, politicians of both old parties as well as inde-

<sup>30</sup> *Mt. Vernon Register*, June 25, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1890, p. 2, August 23, 1890, p. 5, October 20, 1890, p. 6; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 9, 1890, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, August 7, 1890, p. 2, August 10, 1890, p. 4, August 23, 1890, p. 5, September 28, 1890, p. 2; *Official Vote of the State of Illinois... November 4, 1890*, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, October 16, 1890, p. 2, July 9, 1890, p. 2.

pendents descended in large numbers upon the farmers' gatherings where they expounded their views on the agrarian problem, informed the farmer that he was the backbone of the nation, praised their own party or group, and belabored the opposition.

The independent candidates faced the greatest difficulties, and their problems indicated the basic weakness of an agrarian third party in a state where economic conditions had not reduced farmers to desperation. In selecting an independent candidate or ticket, agricultural organizations, in fact, invited their own destruction. Most nominations were made in county assemblies or in conventions composed of delegates from local bodies. In either case, the conclaves were certain to include members of both old parties, and because most of the independent candidates appeared in southern Illinois, a majority were Democrats. A fair percentage of these, unwilling to repudiate their political affiliations, opposed independence. The Republican members, on the other hand, favored it since they recognized a possible means of preventing Democratic victories. For example, the Democrats enjoyed such a large majority in Montgomery County that, when the F.M.B.A. assembly met, they were able to prevent the selection of a ticket. Later the Republicans joined with the true independents in a rump assembly and proceeded to name candidates.<sup>33</sup> This was a procedure certain to enrage the Democrats and drive them out of the organization. Similarly, in those cases where a farm group endorsed an avowed candidate of one of the old parties, the members of the opposition were certain to be displeased. The press of the established parties played on these themes in an attempt to keep their members in ranks. Since many of the independent candidates had run for office before, sometimes on old-party tickets, they were particularly vulnerable to attack. For example, the Republican papers gleefully reminded F.M.B.A. members that Hosea H. Moore, candidate for the state legislature from the forty-fourth district, sought the same office two years earlier on the Democratic ticket. Denouncing the rural party as a "mongrel" group, Republican and Democratic papers warned farmers that their support of independent candidates would only result in victories for their political enemies.<sup>34</sup>

Spokesmen for the old parties were even more vitriolic in attacks

<sup>33</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 10, 1890, p. 3, September 22, 1890, p. 1, August 21, 1890, p. 3, August 31, 1890, p. 4; *Illinois State Register*, August 1, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Albion Journal*, July 17, 1890, p. 1; *White Hall Register*, June 6, 1890, p. 1; *Mt. Vernon Register*, October 22, 1890, p. 1.

on the independents than they were on each other. As early as January, 1890, a leading Republican paper claimed that the farmers' movement was in the hands of a "crowd of discredited politicians," and as the campaign gathered momentum, it observed that the rural groups were being led by "jack lawyers on one hand and long haired fiat cranks on the other . . . a case of the blind leading the blind, bound to fall into the ditch together."<sup>35</sup> But the criticism by the metropolitan press was mild compared to that voiced by local leaders of the old parties. In commenting on farmer candidates in Hardin County, one conservative said that the nominee for county assessor was "an honest farmer who, given sufficient time to meditate, could probably fix a fair cash value for a dozen eggs" while the candidate for superintendent of schools "could write his name by taking plenty of time, knew the number of letters in the alphabet and at least part of the multiplication table. He also knew the habitat of the best local brands of corn liquor." Some candidates invited ridicule by the manner in which they conducted their campaigns. One nominee for county judge toured the constituency on the back of a red mule and claimed that his platform consisted of "no book larnin but plenty of hoss sense."<sup>36</sup>

Both old parties attempted to portray their candidates as "men of the soil," fully aware of the tribulations of agriculture. The Republicans selected Cicero J. Lindley as a congressional candidate because of his position in the F.M.B.A., and they proudly reported that Robert R. Hitt was an "actual farmer." However, the leading self-professed farmer candidate was Edward S. Wilson, Democratic standard-bearer in the race for state treasurer. In spite of repeated efforts, he was never able to secure official endorsement by any farm organization, but his connection with the F.M.B.A. greatly disturbed the Republicans. Since their candidate, Franz Amberg, was clearly a second-rate Chicago politician, they were forced to resort to violent attacks on Wilson. Their spokesmen were on relatively solid ground when they ridiculed Wilson's pose as a practical farmer, since he actually owned only forty acres and had been a lawyer for thirty years, but they displayed their own weakness by making totally unsubstantiated charges.<sup>37</sup> Republican farm leaders

<sup>35</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1890, p. 6, September 3, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> E. F. Wall to author, November 25, 1955.

<sup>37</sup> *Rockford Daily Register*, July 21, 1890, p. 3; *Biographical and Reminiscent History of Richland, Clay, and Marion Counties, Illinois* (B. F. Bowen and Company, Indianapolis, 1909), pp. 167-169; *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1890, p. 1, October 23, 1890, p. 1, October 29, 1890, p. 2.



were even more vicious than ordinary politicians in their attacks on him. Heman H. Haaff did the whole rural movement a disservice by claiming publicly that Wilson was a liar and a fraud who hoped to use the F.M.B.A. to place himself in a position to loot the state treasury. When Stelle rebuked Haaff, the Henry County agitator replied by asserting that the *Progressive Farmer* had become Wilson's unofficial voice and that Stelle was a party to the plot. Although many farmers respected Haaff, his militant Republicanism was so apparent that the F.M.B.A. denounced him, stripped him of his commission as an organizer, and threatened to expel him from the order.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, other candidates worked the "practical farmer" routine for all it was worth. Benjamin F. Caldwell, Democratic contestant for state senator, blandly announced that he worked in the fields although he owned 2,500 acres of rich Sangamon County land and was a bank president in Springfield.<sup>39</sup> In a majority of cases, candidates' relationship to agriculture was so slight that their assertions served only to create violent partisan debates which divided the true farmers, prevented united action, and contributed to the final collapse of agrarian organizations.

As the campaign developed, it appeared that the Democrats enjoyed certain distinct advantages. Not only had their state convention attempted to please the farmers by adopting a progressive platform and by naming candidates satisfactory to rural elements, but the selection of John M. Palmer as candidate for senator contributed materially to Democratic prospects. The manner of his nomination, which came after local groups in every county endorsed him, suggested broadening democracy and, in his unsuccessful bid for governor two years earlier, Palmer had advocated reforms supported by rural groups, discussed sympathetically the ills of the farmer, and generally appealed to agrarian sentiments. Moreover, the failure of the Republicans to name Palmer's opponent allowed the Democrats to claim that their rivals intended to manipulate the state legislature in the usual fashion and elect a senator opposed to the will of the people.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, August 11, 1890, p. 6; *Illinois State Journal*, August 1, 1890, p. 4; *Illinois State Register*, August 7, 1890, p. 4, October 22, 1890, p. 1; Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, *Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 18, 1890, p. 19, June 11, 1890, p. 4, October 29, 1890, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, May 1, 1890, p. 7; Mrs. John M. Palmer, comp., *Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer: The Story of an Earnest Life* (The Robert Clark Company, Cincinnati, 1901), pp. 458-464, 465-473.



Finally, the Democrats were able to exploit the Republican stand on the tariff. Although there was a wide range of opinion among farmers concerning protection, the abrupt rise in retail prices which followed the enactment of the McKinley bill in October seemed to confirm the Democratic charge that Republican policies were robbing the farmer. Even the *Chicago Tribune* criticized the new measure, and Republican politicians were hard pressed to defend it. Joseph G. Cannon, in his campaign for reelection, vigorously defended his vote for the bill, but other Republican candidates were less honest and far from unanimous in its support. Former Governor Richard J. Oglesby, sent on a speaking tour in an effort to offset the unfavorable rural opinion, claimed that he supported the tariff for the same reasons that he was for the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Declaration of Independence, but Cicero J. Lindley, speaking from the same platform, displayed his political wisdom by talking in even greater generalities.<sup>41</sup>

By late September the Republicans were becoming desperate, and they concluded that the situation called for drastic measures. Believing that a state farmers' ticket dictated by them might detract some votes from the Democrats and from Wilson in particular, the chairman of the Republican central committee published a call for a farmers' convention to meet in Mattoon, October 7, 1890. They expected no prominent rural leaders to participate, and they hoped to manipulate the few delegates who appeared to their own advantage. Much to their surprise, however, almost 500 farmers attended and they proceeded to reaffirm the nonpartisan pledge made at Springfield five months earlier.<sup>42</sup> The affair served only to discredit further the Republicans in farmers' eyes.

When the votes were counted, the Democrats found that they had scored an impressive victory. Edward S. Wilson carried fifty-eight counties and defeated Amberg by 9,847 votes; his running mate, Henry Raab, was even more successful and received almost 35,000 votes more than his Republican opponent for the office of superintendent of public instruction. In the congressional races, the Democrats gained seven seats, including the fifteenth where Cannon's career in the House of Representatives was interrupted. The Republicans also suffered defeats in the state senatorial campaign.

<sup>41</sup> *White Hall Register*, October 17, 1890, p. 2; *Illinois State Register*, June 6, 1890, p. 4; *Chicago Tribune*, September 28, 1890, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Illinois State Register*, October 9, 1890, p. 4; *White Hall Register*, October 17, 1890, p. 2.

Although there were contests for senator in only twenty-six constituencies, the Democrats gained nine seats, including one previously held by a Union Labor party member from Chicago, while in the lower house, they won five seats.<sup>43</sup>

The farmers were considerably less successful in their political ventures. The independents, especially, made a poor showing. In the six congressional districts where farmer candidates appeared, none was elected. Andrew Ashton, although supported by farmers as well as Democrats and Prohibitionists, failed to defeat Robert R. Hitt by 500 ballots while Joseph S. Barnum received fewer votes in the tenth district than the Prohibitionist candidate. In the fifteenth district Jesse Harper found only 160 supporters, but most farmers considered it a victory when Busey defeated Cannon. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and twentieth congressional constituencies, John D. Reeder, who was endorsed by the Republicans, ran second to George W. Fithian; Edward Roessler received 4,845 votes, or one-fourth as many as Edward Lane, the Democratic victor; and L. L. Lawrence polled only 945 ballots. Nonpartisan action was only slightly more successful as farmer endorsement of Republican candidates did not insure success in the general Democratic sweep of 1890. In the thirteenth district, where the F.M.B.A. supported Republican Jesse Hanon, their candidate was overwhelmed by William M. Springer; and even Cicero J. Lindley failed to attract a sufficient number of farmers, giving William S. Forman an easy victory. On the other hand, rural groups were pleased with results in the twelfth, fourteenth, and nineteenth districts where Democrats endorsed by agrarian organizations won.<sup>44</sup> But, as in balance of power politics, a group receives little credit for joining an obvious winner.

In the state senatorial-district elections, rural victories were more concrete if only slightly more imposing. No independent senators were elected, and only three independent assemblymen, James Cockrell, Hosea H. Moore, and Herman E. Taubeneck, won the right to sit in the Thirty-seventh General Assembly. By nonpartisan action, however, the farmers helped to elect seventeen Democrat

<sup>43</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois... November 4, 1890*, pp. 3-4; *Blue Book of the State of Illinois*, 1899, pp. 66-69, 106-107; *Illinois State Register*, November 21, 1890, p. 5, November 25, 1890, p. 6; *Chicago Tribune*, November 8, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois... November 4, 1890*, pp. 16-22; *Illinois State Register*, November 25, 1890, p. 6; Thomas B. Reed to Joseph G. Cannon, November 12, 1890, Cannon MSS (Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield).

and eight Republican members who were pledged to agrarian interests.<sup>45</sup> The agricultural groups also won widespread victories in county contests, but an overwhelming majority of them were in the southern half of the state. In centrally-located counties, including Macon and Crawford, they were able to secure only isolated offices, but in southern Illinois areas, such as Hardin County, farmers elected entire tickets.

Spokesmen for both old parties were in substantial agreement as to the causes for the shift in political power from the Republicans to the Democrats. Although the most commonly mentioned reason was the McKinley tariff, other factors, on the national level, were the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, the Force bill, and Thomas B. Reed's domineering methods in the House of Representatives. In Illinois the rising star of John P. Altgeld aided the Democrats, and the controversial compulsory school law of 1889, which required the teaching of reading and writing in English, caused Catholics, Lutherans, and various nationality groups to distrust the Republicans.<sup>46</sup> But the old party politicians were remarkably uninformed if they did not recognize the result of the election as a manifestation of a wave of agrarian discontent which was finally driving the politically docile farmer into at least partial revolt.

Farm leaders, in fact, were quick to claim credit for Democratic victories. John M. Thompson attributed the results of the election to the educational activities of farm organizations which exposed the abuses of the period. Once aroused, farmers flocked to the polls, determined to vote against those responsible, and since the Republicans were in power, they suffered the heaviest losses. But John P. Stelle and others warned the victorious Democrats that the force which placed them in power could just as easily remove them. The farmers of Illinois believed that they had won a great victory, and in the Thirty-seventh General Assembly which convened two months after the election, they expected Democrats elected by their votes to settle accounts by the enactment of beneficial legislation.

<sup>45</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 1890, p. 1, September 11, 1890, p. 2; *Western Rural*, XXIX (May 2, 1891), 277; *Illinois State Register*, November 16, 1890, p. 8, November 19, 1890, p. 1; *Official Vote of the State of Illinois... November 4, 1890*, pp. 23-42.

<sup>46</sup> *Illinois State Register*, November 6, 1890, p. 1, November 22, 1890, p. 1; William A. Robinson, *Thomas B. Reed* (Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1930), pp. 235-246; Ernest L. Bogart and Charles M. Thompson, *The Industrial State, 1870-1893* (Vol. IV of *The Centennial History of Illinois*, Illinois Centennial Commission, Springfield, 1920), p. 183.

## CHAPTER SIX

# Farmers in the State Legislature: The Disaster of 1891

As Illinois farmers studied the results of the election of 1890, they believed the political situation in the state legislature would allow rural groups to exercise great influence. Party strength in both houses was well balanced. In the senate the Republicans had a bare majority of three while in the lower house, there were seventy-seven Democrats, seventy-three Republicans, and three independents.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the rural element was represented in a large and important bloc of delegates. A total of 72 of the 204 members of the General Assembly claimed to be farmers, and not including the three independents, there were twenty-five who in the course of their campaigns had pledged themselves to work for agricultural interests.<sup>2</sup> Finally, agrarian spokesmen were convinced that the Democratic victory was due primarily to rural discontent, and they believed that the Democrats possessed sufficient political wisdom to reward the farmers for their support.

The legislative program which the farmers hoped would be enacted was a composite of demands voiced by the state bodies of the major agrarian organizations. Most important, according to Cicero J. Lindley, was a revision of the state tax structure, including the adoption of a graduated income tax, semiannual payments of personal and property taxes, abolition of the obnoxious state board of equalization, and other measures designed to shift the burden of taxation from landowners to holders of other types of wealth. Additional planks in the rural platform included the adoption of the Australian ballot, a uniform series of textbooks, direct election of senators and members of state regulatory commissions, an antitrust law, reduction of freight and passenger rates, prohibition of trading in grain futures, and regulation of stockyard charges.

<sup>1</sup> *Blue Book of the State of Illinois*, 1899, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, December 10, 1890, p. 4; *Western Rural*, XXIX (May 2, 1891), 277; *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1890, p. 2.

In the implementation of their program, agricultural groups expected to use a judicious combination of pressure and persuasion. Leaders anticipated receiving important assistance from the "Farmers' Club," an informal organization of legislators which had first appeared during the granger period and had functioned in every general assembly since that time. In 1891 it included fifty-eight members "whose vocation is that of a farmer" and who pledged their support to agricultural interests. In addition, the National Farmers' Alliance, the F.M.B.A., and the Illinois State Grange maintained lobbyists at Springfield to supervise the passage of desired legislation.<sup>3</sup> Finally, farmers intended to apply pressure to those members of the legislature who had been elected with rural support. As a Macon County F.M.B.A. member expressed it, "We . . . will present [our] state resolutions to the state and district candidates elected by the Democrats by the aid of our votes and then we will see what will be done."<sup>4</sup>

More immediate and in many ways more important than the legislative program, however, was the election of a United States senator, a contest in which farmers believed they could be the determining factor. Since senators were elected in a joint session of the two houses of the legislature, the three independent assemblymen, Hosea H. Moore, James Cockrell, and Herman E. Taubeneck, held a balance of power between the 101 Democrats and the 100 Republicans. If the two old parties held their ranks, the support of at least two of the independents would be necessary for the successful contestant. Farm leaders convinced themselves that the situation placed the naming of a senator within their grasp. Such a victory would mean not only the sending of a friendly voice to Washington, but its effects on farm organizations in the state, in terms of importance and prestige, would be unmeasurable. The opportunity was considered so great, in fact, that all farm orders embraced Moore, Cockrell, and Taubeneck, and the three independents became the representatives of the entire agrarian movement in Illinois.

The most prominent of the "Big Three," as the independents were called, was Hosea H. Moore. A resident of southern Illinois, he graduated from McKendree College in 1864 and received

<sup>3</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 23, 1891, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, February 8, 1889, p. 9, January 15, 1891, p. 2; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1890, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXII (November 22, 1890), 737; *Illinois State Journal*, November 17, 1890, p. 1.



a medical degree two years later, but he owned and operated a 500-acre farm near Mount Erie in Wayne County. Politically, he was a lifelong Democrat who became an independent in 1890 and won election in the forty-fourth district. Opponents characterized him correctly when they said he was vain and ambitious, and there is little doubt that he hoped secretly to become senator himself. James Cockrell, like Moore, was a former Democrat who repudiated his old party to run for state representative in the forty-third district where members of the F.M.B.A. and the Knights of Labor combined with remnants of the Union Labor party to elect him. A well-known correspondent in the *National Economist* and other agricultural papers, he was considered by his neighbors near Kimmunity to be the perfect example of the honest farmer in politics. Herman E. Taubeneck, the most obscure member of the trio, was educated in law but turned to farming because of poor eyesight. A member of the Grange since 1876, he claimed to be politically independent, but many believed that he favored the Republicans.<sup>5</sup>

The old-party politicians were acutely aware of the role that rural elements might play in the senatorial contest. The Democrats, however, were firmly committed to John M. Palmer, whom many considered primarily responsible for the party's victory in Illinois, and they gave no indication of a willingness to compromise. In fact, they stated categorically that they would accept no "miserable nonentity" who might be named by agrarian groups, and they spent the weeks following the election in attempts to convince farmers that Palmer stood for the common man. The Republicans, on the other hand, appeared to be more receptive to overtures from the agricultural groups. Months before the contest, the Republicans decided to drop Charles B. Farwell, since even they considered him to be corrupt, and because their state convention had made no senatorial nomination, they were in a position to bargain with the farmers.<sup>6</sup>

Long before the legislature met, observers assumed that the three independents would work for the election of a farmer candidate. Taubeneck had been nominated at a convention which instructed him to vote for an "industrial candidate." Furthermore, although

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<sup>5</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, November 18, 1890, p. 1; Chester M. Destler, "The People's Party in Illinois, 1888-1896" (Unpublished thesis in the University of Chicago Library), pp. 64-65; *Albion Journal*, November 13, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *National Economist*, IV (October 25, 1890), 88; Palmer, *Conscientious Turncoat*, pp. 263-264; John R. Tanner to Shelby M. Cullom, November 25, 1890, Cullom MSS.

Democratic papers predicted that Moore and Cockrell would ultimately support Palmer, both candidates, in their campaigns, had vigorously denounced him, so that farmers at least were convinced that they would vote for an independent. The organized farm groups refused to name a specific choice, but the three leading orders clearly indicated their desires, and in the popular mind they placed themselves squarely behind the three independents. The National Farmers' Alliance and the F.M.B.A. petitioned the "Big Three" to support a "practical farmer." John M. Thompson called for the election of a "clean, honest farmer," and George Ball, prominent grange spokesman, observed that it would be a "calamity" if the "Big Three" turned to Palmer.<sup>7</sup> In line with the policy of allowing the independents freedom in selecting a specific candidate, the Farmers' and Laborers' Conference of Illinois met in Springfield, December 9, 1890, and officially asked for the election of a "practical farmer."<sup>8</sup>

By calling for the election of a farmer as senator but, at the same time, refusing to name a candidate, the farm leaders indicated an awareness of the divergent political attitudes of their followers and reflected the problems facing agrarian organizations participating in politics. Any position they took might well be disastrous. While a majority of farmers desired the election of a rural candidate and expressed their views in innumerable petitions and resolutions, there was a large number who considered Palmer the ideal choice. In addition, these members suspected that the Republicans would try to use the farm orders in the state by naming such a well-known, but Republican, agrarian leader as Cicero J. Lindley. Democratic spokesmen played on this theme and emphasized that such action would not only be a travesty on justice but would also lead to a collapse of all rural organizations. By the same token, the Republican press warned that if the independents turned to Palmer, every Republican member would desert the agrarian groups. Milton George clearly expressed the dilemma facing the farmer legislators, and Moore and Cockrell particularly, when he said, "If the man who has belonged to one of the old parties joins hands with that party, the people who belonged to the other party and yet voted for him

<sup>7</sup> *Illinois State Register*, November 12, 1890, p. 4; *Chicago Tribune*, December 13, 1890, p. 1; *Illinois State Journal*, December 8, 1890, p. 4, December 11, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Chicago Daily News*, December 13, 1890, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, December 8, 1890, p. 2.

because he was a farmer and an independent, will kick themselves back into their old party in short order.”<sup>9</sup>

When the legislature assembled, January 7, 1891, both old parties courted the farmers. The Democrats tossed a bone to the independents when they selected James Cockrell's brother as assistant door-keeper of the house, but the Republicans were far more willing to cooperate. A leading spokesman, concluding that “the time for mincing matters is past,” called for any “honorable and creditable combination” with the farmers and suggested that his party support any rural candidate that the independents might name, as long as he was of Republican antecedents. Party leaders were unwilling to go that far immediately, but the Republican house caucus dispatched a committee to the “Big Three,” asking their support in organization of the house and inquiring about possible cooperation later. The farmers took high ground and indicated that any union with the old party would be on their terms. As a counter proposal, they selected one of their own number, Moore, for the speakership and blandly asked the Republicans to support him. The Republicans naturally refused, since they had no desire to place themselves in the position of allowing a former Democrat to name the house chairmanships, if the combined groups won, of the minority members if they lost. Consequently, the Democrats, with a solid majority, elected Clayton E. Crafts of Cook County as speaker and proceeded to organize the lower house.<sup>10</sup>

The jockeying for the control of the house of representatives was only a preview of the struggle over the senatorship, a contest in which the Republicans were even more desirous of cooperation. At the outset the “Big Three” announced that they would never accept a nominee of the old parties, and at the same time, they pledged themselves to stand together on the question. With no guidance from the agrarian organizations in the state, the independents were left to their own devices in selecting a candidate. The fields were full of aspiring prospects. In early discussions, several prominent figures, including John M. Thompson, Cicero J. Lindley, David Hunter, a Republican representative from Winnebago County, John P. Stelle, Jacob W. Wilkin of the state supreme court, and Moore, were mentioned.<sup>11</sup> Taubeneck originally favored Wil-

<sup>9</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 24.

<sup>10</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1891, p. 1, January 7, 1891, p. 1, January 13, 1891, p. 1; *Albion Journal*, January 8, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (January 17, 1891), 40; *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1891, p. 1; *Albion Journal*, November 13, 1890, p. 1.

kin, since he had studied law in the judge's office, but by no stretch of the imagination could Wilkin be considered a farmer. Stelle, although he was a powerful speaker and the most prominent figure in the F.M.B.A., was considered a "trifle light" for the position. Thompson denied that he would accept the nomination, but there appears to be little doubt that he was eagerly listening to all rumors. Lindley was ready to fill any political vacancy which presented itself. Moore was easily the most polished and experienced of the "Big Three," but it was felt that few Republicans would support him under any circumstances. On the other hand, Republican spokesmen intimated that they would accept Hunter, a lifelong member of the party and a well-known farmer.<sup>12</sup>

The "Big Three" rejected all proposals and turned to the "grand old man" of rural independency in Illinois, Alson J. Streeter. While Streeter in effect presented his own name to the independents, he was a logical candidate if the farmers wanted a nominee free of contamination by the old parties. Born in 1823, Streeter grew to manhood on the Illinois frontier, attended Knox College, and in 1855 purchased a farm in Mercer County where he became successful as a cattle feeder. In company with many of his contemporaries, Streeter had participated in the granger movement, become a Greenbacker, and joined the Alliance in turn. Strong convictions and an ability to express himself forcibly made him a leader, and in 1888 he was the Union Labor party's nominee for President.<sup>13</sup> Like all confirmed third-party candidates, there was the aroma of defeat about him, but the independents embraced him and, in a formal announcement, January 13, 1891, proclaimed him as the farmers' candidate. Calling Streeter a man of courage, intelligence, and independence, a friend of the farmer, and an opponent of railroads and corporations, Cockrell advised the Republicans to prove that they were the party of the common man by supporting him.<sup>14</sup>

A week after Streeter received the official support of the three independents, the two houses of the legislature met in joint session to begin the marathon which lasted until March 11, 1891, cost the taxpayers \$150,000, and delivered such a blow to farm orders in the state that they never recovered. After the Democrats nominated Palmer, the Republicans presented Richard J. Oglesby, an old party wheel horse who had twice been governor and had served one term

<sup>12</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 14, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Newcombe, "Streeter," 415-419, 422-435, 443-444, 71.

<sup>14</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 1891, p. 1; *Illinois State Register*, January 14, 1891, p. 1.



as United States senator. James Cockrell nominated Streeter and, in a flamboyant speech, said that in his candidate, "labor" would have, for the first time in the history of the nation, a representative in the Senate who would work to solve the twin problems of money and transportation which had reduced the "toiling millions" to poverty.<sup>15</sup> The voting began and continued until February 6, or through the sixty-second ballot, in the expected fashion. Palmer and Oglesby received the united support of their parties' delegations, and the three independents stood firmly behind Streeter.

Behind the scenes, however, politicians of every shade of political affiliation were busily at work, attempting to break the deadlock. Democrats limited themselves to efforts to keep their members in line and to convince the independents that, by opposing Palmer, they were voting against their own interests. Democratic papers featured farmers' resolutions calling for the election of Palmer but studiously avoided those urging the independents to remain true to Streeter. Claiming that their support of Streeter was only a trick to hide an ultimate shift to some Republican, such as Lindley, the Democrats warned the independents that their constituents would hold them accountable if their votes sent a high tariff senator to Washington.<sup>16</sup> The Republicans, because they still hoped to use the farmers, were less critical of the "Big Three" but concentrated their fire on Palmer, whom many labeled a turncoat because he deserted the Republican party in 1876 to support Samuel J. Tilden. Pointing to his military career and especially his conduct before Atlanta, some bitter Republicans came close to accusing him of cowardice and treachery.<sup>17</sup> However, there appeared to be more truth than fiction to the Democratic charge that their opponents were only waiting for the farmers to switch to an acceptable candidate. The Republicans had little real enthusiasm for Oglesby, and there was little hope of recruiting agrarian votes for him.

In the course of the struggle, the independents were subjected to various forms of pressure. Crafts, as speaker, refused to make com-

<sup>15</sup> *National Economist*, IV (February 28, 1891), 375-376; *Journal of the Senate of the Thirty-seventh General Assembly of the State of Illinois* (Springfield, 1891), pp. 65-66, cited hereafter as *Journal of the Illinois Senate*, 1891; Shelby M. Cullom, *Fifty Years of Public Service* (A. C. McClurg and Company, Chicago, 1911), pp. 198-202.

<sup>16</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 22, 1891, p. 4, February 7, 1891, p. 8, February 19, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Cullom, *Fifty Years*, pp. 190-195; Palmer, *Conscientious Turncoat*, pp. 262-265. Palmer, commanding the Fourteenth Army Corps in the Atlanta campaign in 1864, abruptly resigned his position over a question of rank.



mittee appointments until the senatorial contest was settled, thereby preventing the accomplishment of anything else.<sup>18</sup> Each old party claimed the opposition used loose women, liquor, and easy winning at poker to influence Cockrell. Many people believed that the Republicans offered Moore high office and financial inducements for his vote. Later in the contest, Cockrell and Taubeneck claimed that they had been threatened with bodily violence although it was never clear which group the intimidators represented. Finally, rumors began to circulate in Springfield that Taubeneck was a former convict who had served a term in the Ohio penitentiary for counterfeiting. Agrarian spokesmen rose to his defense, and Milton George observed caustically that, if he was, he would be no worse than the usual representative from Chicago. To set minds at rest, Taubeneck demanded a legislative investigation which completely cleared him but cost the taxpayers over \$600. As the *Western Rural* said, "The mountain groaned and brought forth a mouse."<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, pressure was applied by forces from without the state. Early in February, "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, the newly-elected farmer-congressman from Kansas, appeared in Springfield to urge the independents to turn to Palmer. The Kansan suspected that Streeter would compromise himself on the tariff issue in order to secure Republican votes. Simpson's views were seconded by U. S. Hall, president of the Missouri Farmers' Alliance, who spent several days in Springfield working for Palmer.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, alliance leaders in South Dakota tried to arrange a trade by which the Illinois independents would support Palmer in return for Democratic votes for a farm senator in South Dakota, thereby depriving the Republicans of two senatorial seats.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 24, 1891, p. 4; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Thirty-seventh General Assembly of the State of Illinois* (Springfield, 1891), pp. 559-562, cited hereafter as *Journal of the Illinois House*, 1891.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68, 218, 304-306; *Journal of the Illinois Senate*, 1891, p. xv; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 24, 1891), 66; *ibid.*, XXIX (January 31, 1891), 72; *National Economist*, IV (February 14, 1891), 348; *Illinois State Register*, January 20, 1891, p. 1, February 25, 1891, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, January 23, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 10, 1891, p. 1; *National Economist*, IV (February 14, 1891), 353; *Proceedings* [of the Legislative Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union] of the Session held in Washington, D. C., February 4-6, 1891, Donnelly MSS.

<sup>21</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 10, 1891, p. 1; John M. Palmer to William F. Tuttle, January 29, 1891, Palmer MSS (Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield).

Near the end of January, the farmers began considering alternate candidates. As early as January 22, there were rumors that the independents would drop Streeter, and on January 28 they conferred with him concerning other possibilities. The conference resulted in no immediate change, but on February 10 the "Big Three" shifted to John P. Stelle.<sup>22</sup> The editor of the *Progressive Farmer* aroused something less than wild enthusiasm among the Republicans who remembered his vigorous criticism of Franz Amberg during the 1890 campaign. The Democrats were even more vitriolic in their attacks on him. Claiming that he was a farmer only by "proxy" and that he had failed miserably as both a teacher and an editor, one enraged writer declared that, "It would be a burlesque on statesmanship to think of sending him to the Senate..."<sup>23</sup> Although Stelle continued to be the independent candidate until February 18, there was opposition to him, even among farmers, and Cockrell voted for Lester C. Hubbard, T. D. Hinckley, and Jesse Harper at various times during the period.

As the contest dragged on, the Republicans displayed a growing eagerness to deal with the farmers. On February 2 two former Republican representatives from Mercer County appeared in Springfield to argue that, since Streeter's views were not totally obnoxious to the Republicans and his election would please the people, the Republicans would do well to support him.<sup>24</sup> The Republicans, however, were not yet ready to accept one whom they considered to be an economic radical, so they invited the independents to present alternate candidates upon whom both groups could agree. The "Big Three" complied by offering Streeter, Stelle, and Moore, none of whom was acceptable. On February 11 the Republicans countered with a list of their own. Containing sixteen names and including such widely-known and respected agrarian figures as Lindley, David Hunter, Lafayette Funk, a former member of the state board of agriculture, David W. Wood, Judge Jacob W. Wilkin, and John D. Reeder, the defeated farm candidate for Congress from the sixteenth district, the list constituted a supreme attempt by the Republicans to find a member of their party acceptable to the independents.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 29, 1891, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, January 22, 1891, p. 2; *Journal of the Illinois Senate*, 1891, p. 313.

<sup>23</sup> *Illinois State Register*, January 31, 1891, p. 1, February 4, 1891, p. 1; *White Hall Register*, February 6, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Newcombe, "Streeter," p. 80.

<sup>25</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 12, 1891, p. 8.

The farmers rejected the whole list, and when the Republicans suddenly shifted their entire strength from Oglesby to Lindley on February 11, the situation presented the ridiculous picture of three legislators, elected under the banner of a rural movement, refusing to vote for the president of the leading state organization. The rejection of other possibilities appeared to be equally contradictory. David W. Wood, although a staunch Republican, had been prominent in the agrarian movement since 1880 while John D. Reeder had been nominated by an F.M.B.A. convention only six months earlier. The situation seemed to confirm the charge that at least two of the independents, Moore and Cockrell, were really Democrats who, since they could not vote for Palmer because of campaign promises, were waiting for some other Democrat. At any rate, it was clear that they would accept no Republican, regardless of his views or background.

Moved by desperation, the Republicans resolved to swallow their pride and swing their support to Streeter. Although one prominent spokesman declared that he would not "humiliate" his party by sending a "political nondescript" to the Senate, the Republican state central committee invited Streeter to appear before it for an exchange of views. In a series of consultations, he talked so reasonably that the Republican leaders concluded it would be better to win with an independent than lose with a strong party man. Accordingly, on February 17 the Republicans began transferring their strength to Streeter. At the same time, Taubeneck and Cockrell dropped Stelle to return to their original choice, although Cockrell professed fear that Streeter might have compromised himself to secure Republican votes.<sup>26</sup> To pacify Cockrell and others in a similar frame of mind, Streeter, on February 19, met with the "Big Three" and a delegation of southern Illinois farmers. In the interview he reaffirmed his support of the farmers' program, denied that he had made concessions to either the Republicans or business interests, and talked so convincingly that the "Big Three" pledged their united support as long as there was any hope of success.<sup>27</sup>

As the contest entered its final phase, divisions appeared in each group. Not only did the independents have no guidance from the agrarian groups but the farmers themselves were badly divided. Even within single counties, there was a wide range of opinions. For

<sup>26</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 7, 1891, p. 1, February 10, 1891, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1891, p. 1; *Journal of the Illinois Senate*, 1891, pp. 388-393.

<sup>27</sup> *Illinois State Register*, February 20, 1891, p. 1; Newcombe, "Streeter," p. 86.

example, the Southern Alliance in Greene County supported Palmer, but the county grange called militantly for the election of Streeter. Innumerable cases showed the disastrous effects of the entry of undisciplined farm groups into politics. Cockrell claimed that F.M.B.A. elements which fought him bitterly in the campaign now called, in the name of the organization, for the election of Palmer.<sup>28</sup> Nor were the Democrats blessed with complete solidarity. In the course of the contest, John P. Altgeld, the Cook County judge who was rapidly becoming the leader of Chicago's liberals, and his agents appeared in Springfield where they tried to enlist the support of the independents in case the Democrats were forced to turn to a compromise candidate. Although Altgeld claimed that he went to the state capital to "bolster up the week-kneed members of the 101 [Democratic members of the General Assembly] and to instill new courage in their veins," the independents discovered that "he had a more material substance than courage to distribute."<sup>29</sup>

However, it was divisions within the Republican ranks which prevented them from delivering their full strength to Streeter and finally led to the election of Palmer. As early as February 17, Streeter received 67 Republican votes, and by March 5 the number had increased to 95. But, in spite of pressure from the Republican state central committee and from farmers who felt that the long contest was wasting taxpayers' money and the growing conviction that the independents would ultimately switch to Palmer, five Republican legislators, headed by Henry H. Evans of Aurora, refused to vote for Streeter.<sup>30</sup> Feeling that it would be more beneficial to lose with a true Republican than to turn to a recognized radical, the group resorted to intrigue to split the independents from Streeter. Calling Cockrell to Chicago for an interview, Evans told the farmer that his candidate had bargained away his freedom for Republican support. Cockrell claimed later that he had sufficient reason to be in a receptive frame of mind. In Streeter's acceptance speech, which he had drafted prematurely and shown to the independents, he had accepted the Republican view of the tariff and the Force bill, so Cockrell and Moore came to the conclusion that there was consider-

<sup>28</sup> *White Hall Register*, February 20, 1891, p. 8, February 27, 1891, p. 1; *Illinois State Register*, March 5, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1892, p. 1; Harry Barnard, *Eagle Forgotten: The Life of John Peter Altgeld* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1938), pp. 144-147; Palmer, *Conscientious Turncoat*, p. 265.

<sup>30</sup> *Journal of the Illinois Senate*, 1891, pp. 388-514; *Illinois State Register*, February 25, 1891, p. 4, March 4, 1891, p. 1, March 6, 1891, p. 1.



able validity to Evans' charges.<sup>31</sup> After an interview with Palmer, the two independents announced their decision to support the Democrat. To justify their action, they drafted a letter to the F.M.B.A. in which they reviewed their efforts to elect an independent and claimed that the Republicans had procrastinated for the single purpose of wringing concessions from Streeter. He had succumbed to their wiles and had rendered himself unsuitable as a farmer candidate. Therefore, since Palmer was honest and stood with agrarian groups on such subjects as direct election of senators, a lower tariff, revenue reform, and an expansion of governmental regulatory powers, he represented the best possible choice.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, on March 11 Moore and Cockrell gave their votes to Palmer, assuring his election, while the Republicans voted solidly for Lindley, and Taubeneck, with tears of frustration and anger, remained true to Streeter.

Although Cockrell later admitted that he received money from the Democrats, which he labeled a "present," there was no proof that bribery was the sole or even primary factor in the final outcome of the election.<sup>33</sup> More important, perhaps, were the political loyalties and ambitions of the two men. Both had been Democrats, and their conduct during and after the contest indicates that they had changed nothing but their party labels when they ran as independents. During the struggle in the General Assembly, they flatly refused to consider any Republican, even a fighting farm leader, and Moore at least was honest when he claimed that he thought that Streeter had become tainted with Republican principles. Moreover, both men openly returned to the Democratic party after the legislative session. Moore, in addition, was intensely ambitious and by supporting Palmer, he hoped to win substantial rewards from the Democrats. If nothing else, the outcome of the contest showed clearly the dangers to farm organizations when they placed their futures in the hands of self-styled political leaders who all too often hoped to use the enthusiasm of the moment for their own advantage.

Regardless of the reasons for Moore and Cockrell's conduct, the cry of corruption was immediately raised, by both disgusted farmers and enraged Republicans. Streeter was bitter and inconsolable, calling Moore's and Cockrell's action "damnable treachery." Every major farm paper took up the cry and heaped abuse on the

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, March 10, 1891, p. 1; Newcombe, "Streeter," p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> *Illinois State Register*, March 11, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1892, p. 1.



heads of the independents. The *Prairie Farmer* claimed that the senatorial election was settled by "bargain and sale" while years later, Stelle continued to believe that Palmer was senator "by the grace of lies and treachery." Milton George contented himself by pointing out that the results of the election proved the validity of his teachings and showed that farmers must never participate directly in politics.<sup>34</sup> Farmers at the grassroots were even more vitriolic in their attacks on the two legislators. Moore's Wayne County neighbors burned him in effigy, and local groups throughout the state demanded that they resign and branded them as traitors to the cause. As an example of agrarian feeling but indicating a tendency to bar the door after the horse was stolen, the McLean County Grange asked that all politicians be expelled from agricultural organizations.<sup>35</sup> Taubeneck, who became the spokesman of independency in Illinois, joined in the assault on Moore and Cockrell, calling them traitors and thieves. Looking to the future, he warned that if the Democratic members of farm orders condoned their action, the organizations would collapse, and he observed that the results of the election weakened independency in Illinois since it drove the Republicans back to their party.<sup>36</sup>

Events proved the validity of Taubeneck's views. After the election of Palmer, the strength of the F.M.B.A. began to decline and other organizations in the state suffered. Palmer was considered by many to be a corporation lawyer, and his election with the aid of rural legislators, especially under circumstances which looked very much like corruption, was a heavy blow to agrarian groups which had committed themselves to the election of a farmer. Although a considerable number of farmers, presumably all Democrats, congratulated Palmer on his victory, a majority were utterly disgusted and blamed their agricultural organizations for Streeter's defeat because they had identified the entire movement with Moore and Cockrell.<sup>37</sup> Albert E. Brunson, speaking for the National Farmers'

<sup>34</sup> J. McCan Davis, "The Senator from Illinois: Some Famous Political Debates," Illinois State Historical Society, *Transactions*, 1909 (Springfield, 1909), pp. 93-95; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (June 6, 1891), 360; *Progressive Farmer*, VIII (November 14, 1895), 4; *Western Rural*, XXIX (March 21, 1891), 184; *ibid.*, XXIX (March 28, 1891), 200.

<sup>35</sup> *Albion Journal*, March 26, 1891, p. 1, April 30, 1891, p. 1; *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1891, p. 2; *Mt. Vernon Register*, April 1, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Albion Journal*, March 19, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> An F.M.B.A. member to John M. Palmer, March 22, 1891, Andrew Brown to Palmer, March 16, 1891, George W. Garner to Palmer, March 16, 1891, Palmer MSS.

Alliance, attempted to divorce his group from the whole affair by shifting the blame to the F.M.B.A. Milton George called for a purge of men like Moore and Cockrell and urged the orders to recoup their losses by better organization of honest farmers, while the *Prairie Farmer*, which had been a foremost supporter of the Grange, suddenly found a danger in secret associations and denounced them, claiming that they invited domination by demagogues. Individual farmers followed the lead of their journalistic spokesmen. A Jasper County resident summarized the attitude of many by announcing, "We are crawling back in our holes," and by predicting that most would return to their old parties.<sup>38</sup>

The violent reaction of rural groups was aggravated by the attitude of the Republican press which played on the corruption theme in an attempt to rationalize the party's defeat, to prove that the Democrats resorted to treachery to win, and to destroy agricultural independency. Republican papers specialized in printing rural resolutions denouncing Moore and Cockrell and gleefully reported the return of the two representatives to their old party, thereby proving, at least to the satisfaction of Republicans and the humiliation of independents, that the farmer legislators had always been Democrats in disguise. The bitter *Mt. Vernon Register* consoled itself with the knowledge that, at least, "John P. Stelle's store-bought pants would never warm a Senate seat," but papers like it regularly informed farmers that they had been played for fools.<sup>39</sup>

If the senatorial contest ended disastrously for agricultural organizations in the state, the farmers were equally unsuccessful in securing the adoption of their legislative program. When the General Assembly turned to lawmaking, in fact, the farmers found that they had little voice in the legislative process. Undoubtedly, the results of the senatorial contest did much to demoralize and disgust reform elements, but the immediate reason for a general failure to secure desired legislation was astute direction and control of the General Assembly by the old guard of both parties. In the lower house, Speaker Crafts, using his appointive power shrewdly, packed the important committees with conservatives and rewarded Moore and Cockrell with insignificant chairmanships. Other farmer legislators were given even less important posts. In the senate, where the

<sup>38</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (April 18, 1891), 245; *ibid.*, XXIX (April 25, 1891), 261; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (April 18, 1891), 248.

<sup>39</sup> *Illinois State Register*, March 20, 1891, p. 1, March 21, 1891, p. 1; *Mt. Vernon Register*, April 8, 1891, p. 1.

political uprising of 1890 made fewer inroads, the Republican conservatives retained a firm control.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, the old guard effectively blocked all but a minor part of the farmers' legislative program. Six assemblymen who were official representatives of agrarian and labor organizations introduced thirty-one bills, but most of them died in committee rooms, and none was enacted into law. Taubeneck and other reform legislators worked diligently for the enactment of bills providing for the direct election of railroad and warehouse commissioners, a uniform series of textbooks provided by the state at cost, reduction of both freight and passenger rates, taxation of mortgages, woman suffrage, stockyards regulation, and revision of the state taxing system, but with no success.<sup>41</sup> When the General Assembly adjourned June 12, 1891, the only planks of the rural platform that became law were those calling for the adoption of the Australian ballot and a reduction, to 5 per cent, of the legal rate of interest. Agricultural groups were gratified when the legislature also enacted a measure providing financial assistance for district and county farmer institutes. Finally, although a hostile committee on incorporations rendered them practically useless, the General Assembly accepted two antitrust bills, thereby indicating that the politicians were not totally deaf to the voice of the people. On the other hand, Governor Fifer showed his contempt for the farmers by naming John R. Tanner, a machine politician, to the board of railroad and warehouse commissioners although the agrarian orders of the state called for the selection of George Ball, the Macoupin County Granger.<sup>42</sup>

Six months after the final adjournment at Springfield, Herman E. Taubeneck, in reporting on his activities to the Illinois State Grange, said that the Thirty-seventh General Assembly succeeded in spending more money than any preceding one but failed to improve materially the condition of the people. Recalling that twenty-eight members of the legislature claimed to be alliance men when elected, Taubeneck declared that only one, himself, remained true to his constituents.<sup>43</sup> To some Illinois farmers, the answer was simple. Both parties were corrupt and only by the formation of a

<sup>40</sup> *Journal of the Illinois House*, 1891, pp. 559-562; *Illinois State Register*, March 18, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, April 22, 1891, p. 2; *Illinois State Register*, January 29, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, August 12, 1891, p. 2; *Illinois State Grange, Proceedings*, 1891, p. 15; *Illinois State Register*, March 13, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, December 10, 1891, p. 4.

completely new political organization could agrarian and labor elements free themselves from the abuses of wealthy groups. But, to a majority, the experiences of 1890 and 1891 gave an entirely different lesson. Instead, the senatorial disaster and the failure of the legislative program proved that agricultural organizations should never participate in politics but should limit their political role to education so that members, while exercising their right of suffrage as individuals, could vote intelligently.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Decline and Disappearance of the Agrarian Movement

The alliance movement in Illinois suffered a fatal blow in the senatorial contest of 1891; immediately, a general decline began which terminated in its complete collapse. Only a few days after Palmer's selection, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that "war and dissension are rife among the agricultural organizations of the state"<sup>1</sup> and, three months later, the decay was obvious to any observer. For all practical purposes, the alliance movement ceased to exist before Palmer completed a third of his term. The F.M.B.A., because it was the largest order, suffered the most spectacular collapse, but all associations underwent drastic declines. In fact, by 1894 the Grange was the only one of the five organizations to maintain an effective state body, and it was seriously weakened. The National Farmers' Alliance and the Patrons of Industry faded from the scene without a trace. The F.M.B.A. maintained isolated locals in southern Illinois and a few devoted followers served as a connecting link with twentieth century groups. The Southern Alliance, which became more closely connected with Populism than any of its contemporaries in Illinois, claimed locals in southwestern counties as late as 1896, but they were nothing more than local political clubs.

Although Moore and Cockrell were popularly associated with the F.M.B.A., the National Farmers' Alliance in Illinois was particularly affected by their conduct in the state legislature. Concentrated in northern and east-central Illinois, the membership of the Northern Alliance was predominantly Republican and the election of a "corporation lawyer," especially an obnoxious Democrat, under suspicious circumstances was a crushing blow. When the state body convened in an annual session at Galesburg in December, 1891, the results of political defeat were clearly apparent. Secretary

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<sup>1</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 13, 1891, p. 1.



Kirkpatrick invited any members who desired to attend as well as accredited delegates, but only seventy-two farmers appeared.<sup>2</sup>

The session registered few accomplishments, but it produced significant revisions in the constitution and witnessed the return of Milton George to the ranks of Alliance officers. A total of thirteen resolutions expressed the demands of the group, but they were only restatements of positions taken earlier. One plank, which declared that the order "should continue to maintain the position [that it has] always held as a non-partisan organization," indicated that the association had learned a hard lesson nine months earlier and that it intended to follow, thereafter, the path outlined by Milton George. At the same time, the reiteration of the nonpartisan position reflected a growing dissension between the Illinois group and its parent organization, which under the leadership of plains states radicals was moving rapidly toward independent political action. An amendment to the constitution, which specified that new locals would be responsible only to the state body, showed the effort to break away from the national organization and, at the same time, indicated the inherent weakness of the National Farmers' Alliance. Two other amendments provided for semiannual payment of dues and threatened suspension to those locals which failed to settle accounts promptly. These changes represented an attempt to solve an acute financial problem. By the time of the state meeting, there was only \$56.00 in the treasury, and the organization was totally unable to pay the expenses of the operation.

This financial stringency placed a heavy burden on state officers and led to the election of Milton George as president. Although he did not attend the meeting, the office fell to him by default when Albert E. Brunson refused another term and no likely candidate could be found among the delegates present.<sup>3</sup> George assumed his new duties willingly and set out to regain lost ground, but a steadily declining membership reflecting growing rural apathy defeated him. To add to his difficulties, his management was the subject of violent criticism from other spokesmen. Most vigorous was George's former co-worker, David W. Wood, who acquired control of the *Farmers' Voice* in March, 1892, and used his paper to attack George for his failure to revive the Alliance. Claiming that the founder of the National Farmers' Alliance had a "small, excitable brain," Wood declared that George followed a "miserly, penny-wise and pound-

<sup>2</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (November 28, 1891), 762; *ibid.*, XXX (January 9, 1892), 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Farmers' Voice*, VI (October 1, 1892), 4.

foolish" policy which precluded accomplishments.<sup>4</sup> Although much of Wood's criticism could be explained in terms of journalistic competition, his assaults did nothing to strengthen the organization. Finally, there were clear indications that George's personal financial condition prohibited him from making the type of contributions which maintained the order a decade earlier.

When the fourth state meeting convened in December, 1892, it was apparent to all but the most optimistic observers that the National Farmers' Alliance in Illinois was dead. Only eight delegates, representing widely separated parts of the state, appeared. After recounting earlier victories, George admitted that "few" new locals had been formed during the year, due to "local jealousy, narrow partisanship, and indifference." Blaming the election of 1892 for the obvious weakness in the Alliance, he called for a revival after partisan passions had cooled. At the same time, he expressed a point of view which, in the next century, became the keystone of agrarian philosophy. Observing that society had produced two great and potentially dangerous forces, the element of wealth with its Wall Street, trusts, and monopolies on one side and labor with its "arbitrary demands, strikes, and bloodshed" on the other, he called on agriculture to occupy the middle ground and to use balance of power politics to preserve American democracy.<sup>5</sup>

State officers met in 1893 and a state convention was scheduled for January, 1894, but the Illinois State Farmers' Alliance as a functioning body disappeared after 1892. Isolated local meetings, however, were held throughout 1893, and as late as October, state officers visited locals and urged continuance of the order. In DeKalb County, a new local with sixty-seven members was established in March, 1893. Such groups, however, reverted to the status of independent farmers' clubs, similar to those which had existed twenty-five years earlier.

If the decline of the National Farmers' Alliance was rapid, that of the F.M.B.A. was even more so. Interest in local meetings evaporated after the senatorial fiasco; where 5,000 people gathered at an annual function in the fall of 1890, only 150 appeared a year later. John P. Stelle in October, 1891, admitted that there had been a "general lull in the work of organization during the midsummer," and he called for the election of more dynamic officers who could

<sup>4</sup> *Western Rural*, XXX (April 30, 1892), 282; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (March 26, 1892), 8; *ibid.*, VI (April 30, 1892), 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Champaign Daily Gazette*, December 7, 1892, p. 1; *Western Rural*, XXX (December 24, 1892), 823.

instill new life into the order. Since the F.M.B.A. suffered from a common financial weakness, he urged all locals to make a supreme effort to collect dues from members. Nevertheless, at a meeting of the state assembly which convened in October, 1891, the decline in strength was recognized by all. Only half of the expected delegates appeared, and official figures showed that membership had fallen from a peak of more than 50,000 to 24,000 in only seven months.<sup>6</sup>

The organization attempted to strengthen itself by liberalizing entrance requirements and by adopting the educational practice of the Southern Alliance such as having the official journal of the order present questions for discussion in locals. To overcome financial weakness, a committee recommended that funds be raised by individual assessment, a method guaranteed to result only in failure. The resolutions adopted by the convention were almost identical to those accepted a year earlier and indicated general stagnation.<sup>7</sup> Such innovations as were devised proved to be useless in halting the general deterioration, and when the last meeting of the state body was held in Champaign in October, 1892, only forty-four delegates, sixteen of them from Champaign County, appeared. By March, 1893, Heman H. Haaff reported that total membership in Illinois had declined to 8,000.<sup>8</sup> The collapse of the F.M.B.A. in other states was almost as rapid as that in Illinois.

Like the National Farmers' Alliance, scattered locals of the F.M.B.A. continued to hold meetings, and as late as April, 1893, lodges in one locality established a cooperative creamery. The groups, however, existed as completely independent bodies, having broken their relationship to the state assembly because of politics. In 1895 assemblies of Monroe, Gallatin, and Fayette counties still functioned, and in Franklin County one of the earliest lodges still retained a dozen faithful members. But Stelle commented sadly that throughout Illinois, most of the lodges were inactive and the old spirit was gone. At a picnic held at Morgansville in August, 1895, Stelle "tried to tell a few important truths for the cause of God and humanity," but a singer received more applause.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Mt. Vernon Register*, November 11, 1891, p. 1; *National Economist*, VI (October 24, 1891), 83; *Western Rural*, XXIX (May 2, 1891), 277; *Illinois State Register*, October 20, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (October 31, 1891), 690; *Illinois State Journal*, October 21, 1891, p. 4; *Illinois State Register*, October 21, 1891, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Champaign County Gazette*, October 26, 1892, p. 1; *Western Rural*, XXXI (March 18, 1893), 165.

<sup>9</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, VII (January 3, 1895), 2; *ibid.*, VII (April 4, 1895), 4; *ibid.*, VIII (August 8, 1895), 1. Remnants of the F.M.B.A. survived in south-

The Grange in Illinois survived the senatorial debacle of 1891 with less immediate damage than the National Farmers' Alliance or the F.M.B.A. At a state meeting which convened in December, 1891, the secretary reported the addition of 30 new locals, 2 county groups, and 4,000 members. However, a large part of the gain was registered during the early months of the year, and spokesmen admitted that few additions to the roll had been made after June. Moreover, there were indications that the inevitable decline would not be long delayed. The annual Grange encampment of 1891 was so far from a success that the function was discontinued. The order withdrew its lobbyist from Springfield in 1891, signifying a general contraction of activities.<sup>10</sup> By the next year, the wave of disgust and farmer apathy which destroyed the F.M.B.A. and the National Farmers' Alliance was noticeably affecting the Grange, especially at the grass roots. Throughout the state locals reported a reduction of interest, a loss of members, and, in many cases, complete collapse. At the state Grange meeting of 1892, Thompson blamed the political campaign and poor weather for the obvious decline and appealed for greater efforts in the future to regain lost ground. Rationalizations by the state master, however, could not conceal the fact that 1892 was the first year since 1886 that the organization had not shown an increase in strength. In fact, 21 locals and 1,100 members had disappeared.<sup>11</sup>

The decay continued, without interruption, through 1896 when there were only 4,700 Grangers in Illinois. The Patrons of Industry was absorbed by the Grange in 1893 and leading Grangers made every effort to create locals in southern Illinois counties vacated by the F.M.B.A., but the deterioration could not be halted. For example, in 1893 only one of the eight granges in Greene County

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ern Illinois, and in 1901 a revival began. In April, 1906, it joined with the Farmers' Social and Economic Union and the Farmers' Relief Association, both of which were established in 1900, to form the Farmers' National Union. A year later, the combined group merged with the Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America. See Charles S. Barrett, *The Mission, History and Times of the Farmers' Union* (Marshall and Bruce Company, Nashville, Tennessee, 1909), pp. 237-240; *Dablgren Echo*, January 31, 1907, p. 3. John P. Stelle, in April, 1904, became associate editor of *Up-to-Date Farming*, the official journal of James A. Everitt's American Society of Equity. Eliza Coker Stelle, *Diary*, MSS, January 1, 1905; James A. Everitt, *The Third Power* (Indianapolis, 1905), p. 248.

<sup>10</sup> *Illinois State Register*, December 9, 1891, p. 1; Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1891, pp. 10, 37, 57.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1892, pp. 9, 25; Greene County Grange, *Proceedings*, MSS, September 1, 1892, December 1, 1892; *Illinois State Journal*, December 14, 1892, p. 1.



reported full membership and regular attendance while in neighboring Macoupin County, the association was completely dormant. In 1894 four new bodies were formed in the state, but that number was insignificant in comparison with the overwhelming losses.<sup>12</sup> The Grange, however, managed to maintain a shadowy existence and, in the middle of the twentieth century, remains a social and fraternal organization with devoted rural followers.

The Southern Alliance in Illinois continued to grow in 1891 but began a rapid decline the following year. Speaking in November, 1891, Charles W. Macune said, "Illinois is among the more recently organized states, but it is making good progress in Alliance work. The order has met considerable opposition, but through conservative methods and earnest work has succeeded in reaching solid ground." When the association held its annual session in October, 1891, Fred G. Blood reported that the organization had 459 lodges and from 12,000 to 15,000 members scattered through 26 counties.<sup>13</sup> Although total strength was only one-fourth that of the F.M.B.A. at the height of its power, the membership of the order had more than doubled in the course of one year, and by October, 1891, it was the second largest agricultural group in the state.

Like the Grange, the Southern Alliance hoped to benefit through the collapse of the F.M.B.A. and the National Farmers' Alliance by taking advantage of the misfortunes of its contemporaries. The state body in the fall of 1891 authorized the placing of an official organizer in each congressional district and established a lecture bureau to coordinate the engagements of prominent speakers. It also invited any local of the Northern Alliance, the F.M.B.A., or the Grange to join it, a procedure which accomplished little but enraged rival leaders.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after the state meeting of 1891, the indications of approaching collapse became apparent. The failure of the *Alliance Free Press* in November, 1891, showed a decline of interest, and the increasing insignificance of officials of the Illinois group in the major meetings of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union displayed

<sup>12</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1896, pp. 24-25; *ibid.*, 1893, pp. 12, 35; Greene County Grange, *Proceedings*, MSS, March 21, 1893, December 7, 1893; National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, *Journal of Proceedings*, 1894, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> *National Economist*, VI (November 14, 1891), 136; *ibid.*, V (June 13, 1891), 199; *Illinois State Register*, October 28, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, October 29, 1891, p. 5; *Illinois State Journal*, October 29, 1891, p. 1.



the association's lack of importance. In the spring of 1892, when the national body tried to raise money for a "propaganda fund" by direct subscription, contributions in Illinois were practically nonexistent.<sup>15</sup> A final state meeting, held in October, 1892, was a failure, and the following year, when Fred G. Blood wrote a history of the national movement, he neglected to mention the Illinois group in which he had been so active.

As all organizations declined, leaders considered confederation as a means of strengthening the entire movement. Recognizing that differences in name and form were partly responsible for the "stand-still" in which locals found themselves, many spokesmen concluded that only by some type of union which would allow them to present a solid front could the various organizations hope to save themselves. Among the Illinois leaders, none was more enthusiastic about confederation than Milton George. As early as December, 1889, he called for such a step, and for the next three years, or until organized strength ceased to exist, he was a constant advocate.

Confederation was discussed in 1889, but the first step toward actual union was taken at Springfield, May 2, 1890, when the Farmers' and Laborers' Conference was formed. The organization failed to promote state-wide cooperative enterprises, as had been hoped, for it proved to be purely political in purpose. After the fall election, it met to make the ill-fated decision to ask the three independent assemblymen to work for the election of a farmer senator. The events of 1891, however, were as disastrous for the Conference as they were for its component parts, and during the remainder of the year the association was dormant. Only in 1892, when a number of leaders became convinced that "If we do not consolidate, our enemies will eliminate us in detail," was there a renewal of efforts to form an effective union.<sup>16</sup>

After unsuccessful conventions were held in Decatur and Chicago in May, 1892, representatives of farm and labor groups made a supreme effort at a meeting in Springfield, September 22, 1892. In addition to delegates from the original organizational participants, the gathering included representatives of the Patrons of Industry

<sup>15</sup> *National Economist*, VI (November 14, 1891), 129; *ibid.*, VI (November 28, 1891), 166; *ibid.*, VIII (December 10, 1892), 5; *Proceedings* [of the Legislative Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union] of the Session held at Washington, December 4-6, 1891, Donnelly MSS; *National Economist*, VII (April 30, 1892), 109.

<sup>16</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 21; *ibid.*, XXX (February 20, 1892), 117.

and the Southern Alliance.<sup>17</sup> Milton George, who attended as a delegate from the National Farmers' Alliance and the Patrons of Industry, was largely responsible for the outlines of an organization which, if ratified by the various state bodies, would have created a seemingly effective union. A new association, known as the United Farmers and Laborers of Illinois, was to be created. It was to be a federation with each order maintaining control of its own management but uniting in a common front on matters of mutual interest. In annual meetings, each participating organization was to have one delegate at large and one additional representative for each 2,000 members. The unified association, besides assisting in the maintenance and expansion of each of its component parts, would eliminate competition among them and would provide unity in legislative and cooperative business matters.<sup>18</sup>

Following the meeting, Milton George was so enthusiastic that he believed that similar federations could be established in other states, thereby providing the basis for a truly national organization. The *Farmers' Voice*, critical as usual, called the proposed union a "wild, impractical scheme," but many farmers welcomed it and at least two orders, the National Farmers' Alliance and the F.M.B.A., endorsed it. But when a second meeting was held at Springfield, December 20, 1892, to establish the federation formally, the representatives of the Grange proved to be obstinate. Apparently believing that their organization, with its firmer base and traditions, could survive the decline in interest and gradually absorb the members of competing groups, they refused to cooperate and the whole project collapsed.<sup>19</sup>

With failure staring them in the face, farm leaders began to seek reasons for the decline of groups which had been formed and expanded so laboriously. All spokesmen agreed that the senatorial disaster was a primary cause, and conservative leaders blamed the more basic decision to enter politics. But additional factors could be cited. As in the case of the early Grange, rapid growth which

<sup>17</sup> *Prairie Farmer*, LXIV (June 4, 1892), 360; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 21; *ibid.*, XXX (May 21, 1892), 330. The Southern Alliance was not invited to participate in the 1890 meeting because of widespread bitterness among opposition leaders. Stelle claimed that the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union was not in favor of consolidation in 1890 because it hoped to "swallow" other organizations.

<sup>18</sup> *Illinois State Journal*, September 23, 1892, p. 4; *Western Rural*, XXX (October 1, 1892), 634.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, XXX (October 8, 1892), 650; *ibid.*, XXX (December 17, 1892), 810; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (October 1, 1892), 4; *ibid.*, VII (January 14, 1893), 4.

was caused by great expectations led to disappointment when accomplishments fell short and at the same time permitted the admission of those who desired to use the membership for their own advantage. All farmers believed that they had been tricked by Moore and Cockrell, but many had a vague feeling that such men as Edward S. Wilson had used them as well. The failure of cooperative business efforts disenchanted a good many members. Others were confused and frustrated with the seemingly useless competition among the orders in the state and with personal jealousies and petty haggling among leaders. A final blow was struck by overly zealous reformers who, determined to create a Populist party in Illinois, attempted to transfer the allegiance of basically conservative and thoroughly disgusted farmers to the new political movement.

From the outset, cooperative buying and selling schemes faced almost overwhelming difficulties. The contract system evoked such opposition from local merchants that it soon became impractical. The agency system contained basic weaknesses and often floundered on the individualism of the farmers themselves. After placing orders, farmers occasionally changed their minds as to the type or amount of a commodity desired and left the organization with a large supply but no buyers. In 1893, for example, a poor harvest prevented the use of all the binder twine acquired by the state Grange which, at the end of the year, found itself with a holdover of 25,000 pounds. The complete refusal of farmers to concentrate their business with one or a few concerns further handicapped the work.<sup>20</sup>

Even more dangerous to the continuation of agrarian organizations were the farmer-owned concerns. In many cases farmers opposed their establishment and refused to patronize them because they remembered the financial fiascoes of the 1870's. In other instances they were organized on "general and loose" principles and directed by men having little or no business ability. Farmers were slow to learn that managing a store required talents not always found in a man who could plow a straight furrow. But even where the stores were skillfully handled, there was no guarantee of success. Because they usually had little financial backing, most of them were forced to operate on a cash basis, thereby eliminating the patronage of the large number of farmers who required credit and reducing the volume of business. Also, they were particularly susceptible to cutthroat competition by regular merchants who were able to play on the gullibility of farmers. John M. Thompson cited one case in which machinery dealers lowered the price of plows to \$1.00 below

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<sup>20</sup> Illinois State Grange, *Proceedings*, 1893, pp. 13, 41.

cost and succeeded in ruining the cooperative store in the neighborhood when farmers rushed to take advantage of the bargain. Needless to say, the price returned to its former level when the unwelcome competitor disappeared. In some areas, local merchants were shrewd enough to band together and distribute losses proportionally until cooperative businesses collapsed.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, farmer shareholders in cooperative concerns seemed to distrust their own managers and displayed a tendency to abandon the whole project at the first sign of weakness. Shrewd rural investors in cooperative businesses hurried to sell their shares when reverses appeared, thereby leaving their neighbors to support the project and absorb the losses. The Farmers' Alliance Corporation, a grain-handling concern at Ivesdale with fifty-two original shareholders, found itself in 1894 with only five co-owners. Later, one of them purchased the interests of the other four and continued to operate the concern as a private business. Losses resulting from failures were sometimes heavy. As early as 1888 a store in Marshall collapsed with over \$10,000 in debts, and in 1891 an F.M.B.A. concern in Golconda failed, leaving its unfortunate stockholders liabilities amounting to \$5,000.<sup>22</sup>

The presence of separate organizations handicapped the agrarian uprising in Illinois, but the entrance of the Southern Alliance, bringing with it heated controversy and vigorous competition with other groups, was of far more importance in weakening the whole movement. Bitterly opposed by such leaders as Milton George, John P. Stelle, and Heman H. Haaff, the southern association, by its aggressiveness, its attempts to absorb competitors, and its militant support of unpopular measures, such as the subtreasury plan, created greater divisions among farmers than its size warranted. George disliked the southern leaders for personal reasons, claiming that they refused to recognize the role that he played in organizing southern farmers. Both the National Farmers' Alliance and the F.M.B.A. resented the size and power of the southern order, and there was considerable bitterness when the larger group absorbed whole organizations in the plains states. In Illinois the southerners limited themselves to attempts to capture locals belonging to their competitors, a procedure which accomplished little but created

<sup>21</sup> Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, pp. 375-378; *Chicago Tribune*, January 6, 1890, p. 6; *Albion Journal*, January 26, 1892, p. 4; *Western Rural*, XXIX (September 5, 1891), 572.

<sup>22</sup> Charter of Farmers' Alliance Company, Box 494, No. 18310, MSS; *Champaign County Gazette*, January 25, 1888, p. 1; *Albion Journal*, January 15, 1891, p. 1.



violent controversy and confused farmers. Stelle accused the southerners of lacking "common courtesy" in their organizing techniques. Moreover, northern leaders were acutely aware that the Southern Alliance possessed a stronger financial base and was able to secure more capable officers, employ more effective lecturers, and distribute more literature. Heman H. Haaff reflected a common northern attitude when he vigorously denounced southern officers as salaried demagogues because they were paid as much as \$3,000 a year.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the Southern Alliance supported measures unpopular with Illinois farmers and totally unacceptable to local leaders. Foremost was the subtreasury plan. Proposed in 1889 by Charles W. Macune and officially accepted by the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union at its Ocala, Florida, meeting in 1890, the plan was never welcomed by Illinois farmers and received rough treatment at the hands of a majority of local spokesmen. While Stelle and other F.M.B.A. leaders accepted wholeheartedly the southern platform adopted in St. Louis in 1889, they were cool toward the addition made a year later, and not even the Southern Alliance delegation from Illinois would support Macune's marketing plan. Northern Alliance spokesmen were bitter in their denunciation of it. Pointing out that hogs could not be stored, they claimed the plan would only defraud the prairie farmer.<sup>24</sup>

Another unpopular project, one which created its share of disension and controversy, was the trading arrangement made with the National Cordage Company. The southerners strongly supported it and sent prominent speakers into Illinois to urge its acceptance. But Milton George, as well as numerous other Illinois leaders, believed he saw the danger of monopolistic control of local stores in the arrangement and for six months denounced it and its supporters with a vigor usually reserved for railroad managers and other businessmen. Other spokesmen took up the cry, and the debate became so bitter that prominent leaders accused each other of taking bribes and of being common liars.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Industrial Struggle*, pp. 35-36; *Western Rural*, XXIX (January 17, 1891), 37; *National Economist*, III (August 9, 1890), 339; *White Hall Register*, August 1, 1890, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Fred A. Shannon, "C. W. Macune and the Farmers' Alliance," *Current History*, XXVIII (June, 1955), 334-335; *National Economist*, IV (December 20, 1890), 213; *ibid.*, IV (January 3, 1891), 246; *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, November 19, 1891, p. 5; *Western Rural*, XXX (February 20, 1892), 120; *ibid.*, XXX (June 11, 1892), 370; *National Economist*, VII (June 18, 1892), 211.



A factor which was a cause as well as an effect in the decline of the alliance movement was the loss of journalistic support. Reflecting the fortunes of the National Farmers' Alliance, the *Western Rural* in April, 1893, was reduced in size. Moreover, it was apparent that George's financial condition was steadily deteriorating. In 1889 he was sufficiently wealthy to donate his 300-acre Cook County farm, valued two years later at \$90,000, as a site for a school for homeless boys. But by 1894 unwise business investments and declining circulation forced him to dispose of the *Western Rural*.<sup>26</sup> With the departure of George, agrarian organization in Illinois lost its warmest and most reliable supporter. The *Prairie Farmer*, never a crusading journal, conveniently ignored the whole question of rural movements when it appeared that they were in the process of disappearing. The *Progressive Farmer*, which became a Populist organ in 1892 and proceeded to alienate a considerable portion of its readers, began a decline in importance which ended in 1896 when the name was changed to the *Progressive Home*. The following year, Stelle discontinued publication and returned to school teaching.<sup>27</sup> Most of the minor journals that developed with the alliance movement did not survive 1891. After the senatorial fiasco, there was a wholesale collapse of local reform papers which had supported the farmers in the campaign of 1890.

Finally, the rise of the Populist party and the attempts of local leaders to identify agrarian organizations with it completed the destruction of the alliance movement in Illinois. In most states of the Middle West, especially those beyond the Mississippi, Populism was a natural outgrowth of the alliance movement. Particularly oppressed, facing financial disaster, and burdened in many cases with conditions of nature which made rural life even less rewarding than elsewhere, the farmers of Kansas and Nebraska made the transition from Alliance members to Populists with little soul searching. But in Illinois the situation was entirely different. Distress was widespread, but it was not strong enough, except in limited areas, to convert Democrats and Republicans into Populists. Political loyalties simply could not be broken, especially in rural areas

<sup>26</sup> *Western Rural*, XLVII (September 20, 1894), 593; *ibid.*, LII (December 20, 1894), 810; Illinois School of Agriculture and Manual Training for Boys, *Fifth Annual Report* (George K. Hazlitt and Company, Chicago, 1892); "Sixty-Five Years in Review," *The Glenwood Boy*, L (May, 1952), 1. Sixty years after the gift, the school still existed on the site of George's "Rural Glen" farm.

<sup>27</sup> *Albion Journal*, November 3, 1892, p. 2; Eliza Coker Stelle, Diary, MSS, January 1, 1896, January 1, 1897, January 1, 1898.

where the bloody shirt was still effectively used by Republicans and thoroughly hated by Democrats. Furthermore, conservative Illinois farmers could see in the results of the election of 1890 the dire consequences of political action. Believing that they had been betrayed by their own men, such farmers would never support a state or national independent movement and would speedily repudiate those leaders who attempted to lead them into independency.

However, during 1891 and 1892 there were leaders in Illinois who believed that the alliance movement was only the first step toward reform. They accepted many of Milton George's teachings, but they felt it necessary to go beyond the social, educational, and cooperative features he emphasized. To them, the Alliance was a valuable educational medium, but they considered understanding useless without some effective means of expression. Like the conservatives, such men looked to the election of 1890 for a justification of their stand. Pointing out that nonpartisan action accomplished little, that candidates' pledges meant next to nothing after election day, and that a farmer, once he became a part of the legislative machinery of an old party, could be as corrupt as his co-workers, the independent leaders welcomed the appearance of Populism.

The Populist party in Illinois was the descendant of the independency of the 1870's and of the Union Labor party of 1888. Headed by such men as Alson J. Streeter, Herman E. Taubeneck, and Jesse Harper, the new movement was Greenbackism expanded and operating under another name. Streeter, Taubeneck, Fred G. Blood, and Lester C. Hubbard, editor of the *Farmers' Voice*, supported wholeheartedly the call for a national convention in Cincinnati, May 19, 1891, and in that "mass convention of self-appointed delegates," joined with extremists like Ignatius Donnelly to work actively for a new party. The southerners and conservatives from the northwest, including the future Populist candidate for President, James B. Weaver, advised the conclave to postpone any definite step until a later date, but the radicals carried the day, and the outlines of a new national party were established. The selection of Taubeneck as national chairman indicated the importance of the "Big One" among the delegates present.<sup>28</sup>

With the party partially established, there remained the problem of planting it on Illinois soil, a task that did not appear encouraging. The fact that only 50 representatives from Illinois, as compared to

<sup>28</sup> C. A. Powers to Ignatius Donnelly, June 3, 1891, Donnelly MSS; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, pp. 213, 216; Newcombe, "Streeter," p. 89; Destler, "People's Party," pp. 76-77.

over 400 from Kansas, traveled to Cincinnati indicated a distinct coolness, and the leading farm journals were clearly opposed to the project. The *Prairie Farmer* denounced the "professional politicians" and "utopian ideas" prevalent at Cincinnati, claimed that the lack of harmony precluded any worthwhile accomplishments, and advised Illinois farmers to ignore the gathering and those responsible for it.<sup>29</sup> Milton George, a month before the convention, said, "If out of the independent vote, brought about as a result of organization among farmers, there should spring up a great national movement as a new political party with high aims for the betterment of the conditions of the masses, we say let it come." But as the new group took shape, he retreated from his advanced position and resumed his opposition to any independent action. Observing that "The name of a political party is the red flag that maddens the wild bull," he pointed to the differences between the despairing farmers of the "extreme west" and the "conservative grangers" of the older settled states which would prevent united political activity. At the same time he denounced those who would identify the alliance movement with a party, since he recognized clearly that the order could never be made to coincide with the outlines of a political organization.<sup>30</sup> The *National Economist*, reflecting the political conservatism of Charles W. Macune, announced that the Cincinnati convention had no sanction from the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union and commented shrewdly that it was called by a few whose zeal exceeded their wisdom.<sup>31</sup>

The farm orders in Illinois were equally adamant in their opposition to the decisions reached in the Cincinnati convention. In May, 1891, the executive committee of the F.M.B.A. flatly refused to endorse third-party action while the *Alliance Free Lance* indicated serious doubt as to whether a new party would benefit the farmer. John M. Thompson, speaking for the Grange, said categorically, "As there is no politics in our organization, the third party movement will not be discussed." Finally, a majority of the prominent leaders in Illinois were vigorous in their opposition to any efforts to submerge their orders in a political movement.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Illinois State Register*, May 21, 1891, p. 1; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (June 6, 1891), 360.

<sup>30</sup> *Western Rural*, XXIX (April 18, 1891), 248; *ibid.*, XXIX (January 10, 1891), 24; *ibid.*, XXIX (June 6, 1891), 362.

<sup>31</sup> *National Economist*, IV (February 21, 1891), 357.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, IV (January 24, 1891), 299; *Illinois State Register*, May 15, 1891, p. 4, December 8, 1891, p. 1; *Albion Journal*, August 20, 1891, p. 1.

Undaunted by such expressions of disapproval, the independents proceeded with their work. Streeter, Taubeneck, and S. F. Norton, a well-known radical from Chicago, called a meeting in Springfield, August 13, 1891, to perfect the state organization of the Populist party. Although the date of the convention was selected to coincide with the annual Grange encampment, which was in progress at nearby Pawnee and in which all agrarian groups in the state participated, few farmers appeared. Among the forty delegates, Chicago was well represented, but prominent agrarian leaders were conspicuous by their absence; Fred G. Blood of the Southern Alliance was the lone exception to the rule. Nevertheless, the convention proceeded to draw up a constitution, establish a state central committee, and elect officers, including Lester C. Hubbard, chairman, and H. E. Baldwin, editor of the *Joliet News*, secretary.<sup>33</sup>

With the party established, Populist leaders were determined to secure the endorsement of the rural associations in the state. Taubeneck believed that, while there would be opposition, the Populists, by using "discretion," could swallow whole organizations and thereby acquire the support of large numbers of Illinois farmers. In line with this policy, the Populists made a concerted effort to absorb the F.M.B.A. and the Southern Alliance in Illinois by securing the election of party members as officers.<sup>34</sup> The fact that agrarian orders were declining played into the Populists' hands. Since conservative farmers had lost all faith in the groups, the annual conventions included majorities inclined toward independency and were easily managed by the third-party men.

At the state meeting of the Southern Alliance in 1891, Blood claimed that all political faiths were represented, but observers noted that a majority of the delegates were Populists and that every state officer elected at the gathering, with a single exception, was a member of the new party.<sup>35</sup> Similar tactics worked in the state assembly of the F.M.B.A. Taubeneck, Streeter, and John P. Stelle, whose third-party leanings were obvious by the fall of 1891, appeared at the convention to work for the election of Populists. Cicero J. Lindley, dedicated to the nonpartisan principles upon which the

<sup>33</sup> *Illinois State Register*, August 14, 1891, p. 6; *Farmers' Voice*, V (August 22, 1891), 10; *Western Rural*, XXIX (August 22, 1891), 537.

<sup>34</sup> Herman E. Taubeneck to Ignatius Donnelly, September 6, 1891, Donnelly MSS; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIII (December 5, 1891), 769.

<sup>35</sup> William A. Peffer, "The Farmers' Alliance," *Cosmopolitan*, X (April, 1891), 697; *Illinois State Register*, October 28, 1891, p. 6; *Illinois State Journal*, October 28, 1891, p. 1, October 30, 1891, p. 1.



order was founded, was dropped as president, and Nathan M. Barnett, an avowed Populist from Dewitt County, was named in his stead. In all, the independents were able to place seven Populists on the board of officers and the executive committee as compared to only two old-party men.<sup>36</sup> The Populists were unsuccessful in their efforts to infiltrate the Illinois State Grange, although they dangled the nomination for governor before John M. Thompson, and they apparently ignored the National Farmers' Alliance.

Leading Populist spokesmen publicly denied that they were attempting to absorb the stronger farm orders, but most farmers were aware of their efforts and disliked their duplicity. Even in the poorer counties of the state, few farmers were in sympathy with the Populists, and everywhere they resented the Populists' high-handed conduct. When the Illinois F.M.B.A. announced its decision to send delegates to the independent convention at St. Louis, February 22, 1892, local groups in wholesale numbers protested its action and individual farmers announced flatly that they would have nothing more to do with the order.<sup>37</sup> Farmers with Democratic tendencies were especially displeased with the Populists. They considered as victories the election of 1890 and the selection of Palmer, and they were in no mood to endanger their party's chances in 1892 by encouraging an independent ticket which could only detract votes from it. Similarly, events since 1890 had solidified Republican ranks by causing many whose allegiance had wavered to return to their old party with a passionate loyalty.

The results of the election of 1892 showed clearly that agrarian insurgency in Illinois, as an effective political force, was dead. James B. Weaver, heading the Populist ticket, received only 22,207 votes, or slightly more than 2 per cent of total cast as compared to 48 and 41 per cent in Kansas and Nebraska. On the state level, Nathan M. Barnett polled 20,103 votes, 4,000 less than the Prohibition candidate for governor. None of the Populist nominees for Congress, state senator, or state representative were elected. Even more distressing to third-party men was the severe reduction of independent strength as compared to 1890. In the forty-third senatorial district, where James Cockrell won 11,940 votes, a Populist candidate two years later polled only 6,915. Third-party nominees running in Moore and Taubeneck's old constituencies fared even worse.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, October 20, 1891, p. 1, October 21, 1891, p. 4; *Illinois State Register*, October 22, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 1892, p. 14; *Prairie Farmer*, LXIV (January 23, 1892), 56; *Farmers' Voice*, VI (January 23, 1892), 8-9.



T. D. Hinckley, one of the prime movers of independency in Illinois, was nominated for state representative in the forty-second district, an early center of F.M.B.A. strength, but he received a pitiful 297 votes. As a final indication of the weakness of the insurgents, the total number of ballots cast for Populist congressional candidates was 6,000 less than the victorious Joseph G. Cannon polled in regaining his fifteenth district seat from Samuel T. Busey.

Weak as Populist strength was, however, it reflected the geographical distribution of alliance power of eighteen months earlier. The southern district of the state contributed 39 per cent of Weaver's vote in Illinois while the central and northern divisions gave 36 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively. In the northern thirty-three counties, however, if the vote of Cook County is subtracted, the Populist presidential candidate received only 3,920 ballots or 18 per cent of his total.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, insurgency was strongest among the grain farmers of central and southern Illinois, but even there it was almost nonexistent.

The results of the 1892 campaign in Illinois followed the general outlines developed throughout the Middle West. The emotionalism of a presidential campaign made political loyalties stronger than they had been two years earlier; Democrats wanted to continue the wave of victories begun in 1890 while Republicans were determined to save the country from Cleveland. In Illinois the appeal of John P. Altgeld, with his strenuous campaign and progressive appearance, materially reduced the protest vote. Still, in final analysis the inherent weaknesses of the Populist party in the Prairie State, based as it was on a fast disappearing alliance movement, combined with farmer apathy and widespread disgust with politics in general to eliminate any possibility of victories in Illinois.

If the first Populist campaign was discouraging, the later history of the party was even more so. With the weak showing of 1892 before them, some Illinois Populists concluded that, because of the extent of industrialism in the state and the long tradition of urban radicalism in Chicago, the party's best hope for success lay in an alliance between discontented elements in both city and country. This, in theory, had been the object of the Union Labor party, and since 1888 the *Farmers' Voice* and leading independent spokesmen had advocated the union of all "producers." The divisions among Chicago's laboring men, ranging from conservative trade unionists

<sup>38</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois . . . November 8, 1892*, pp. 3-6, 16-23, 51-52; *Blue Book of the State of Illinois*, 1899, pp. 70-71, 107.

to descendants of the anarchists of 1886, made such a combination difficult, especially in view of the general suspicion which characterized farmers' attitudes toward city workers. But the greatest hindrance to cooperation arose over a basic difference in philosophy between even the more aggressive rural leaders and the more vocal spokesmen for urban malcontents. To the agrarian Populists, limited collectivistic methods and objectives were only means to restore a democratic capitalism, but to the Marxist imbued labor leaders in Chicago, collectivism was an end in itself. Therefore, a Populist-labor alliance was formed in Illinois at a meeting in Springfield in July, 1894, only after the labor demand for "the collective ownership by the people of all means of production and distribution" was dropped, and a compromise suggested by Henry Demarest Lloyd was substituted.<sup>39</sup>

The hybrid party in 1894 polled a greater number of votes than did the Populists in 1892, but the increase was concentrated in Chicago. While Nathan M. Barnett received only 1,350 votes in Cook County in 1892, Lavina E. Roberts, a former Southern Alliance speaker from Pike County who ran for superintendent of public instruction, polled 32,018 two years later. Downstate, however, the Populist-labor candidate received only 6,000 more votes than Barnett was given in 1892, and it was apparent that the major part of this small increase came from labor elements in coal mining areas and railroad centers. No third-party candidates were elected on the state, congressional, senatorial district, or county levels.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of any apparent advantage of joining with labor groups, the national officers of the Populist party, including Herman E. Taubeneck, never reconciled themselves to sharing a ticket with left wing labor interests, and they opposed including the radical demands of urban groups in the national platform. Moreover, the rising importance of the money issue pushed others into the background and contributed to the collapse of the Populist-labor alliance soon after the election of 1894. As early as June, 1892, in fact, Stelle believed that the financial question was the most important problem facing farmers, and he gave an increasingly prominent place to discussions of it in the columns of the *Progressive Farmer*. A free copy of *Coin's Financial School* came to be one of the most

<sup>39</sup> Chester M. Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901* (Connecticut College, New London, 1946), pp. 162, 169-170, 224; Caro Lloyd, *Henry Demarest Lloyd, 1847-1903* (2 vols., G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1912), I, 241-247.

<sup>40</sup> *Official Vote of the State of Illinois . . . November 8, 1892*, pp. 5-6; *ibid.*, November 6, 1894, pp. 5-6.

commonly-offered inducements to new subscribers. Other Illinois leaders expressed similar views, and C. A. Robinson, the last president of the F.M.B.A., went so far as to ascribe all agrarian problems to the "crime of 1873" and what he assumed to be the resulting contraction of the currency.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the Illinois Populists were fully prepared to follow the national organization in July, 1896, when it turned to fusion, that abyss from which no third party ever returns. As an example for others, Stelle in the fall of 1896 worked industriously for the election of William Jennings Bryan.

. . . .

The alliance movement in Illinois, although it disappeared without having created an effective third party, was by no means a failure nor should it be dismissed as simply the reaction of irrational farmers lost in a capitalistic world. Like the Grange before it, the alliance movement broke down rural isolation, gave country people a social medium, and introduced farmers to national problems, thereby permitting them to participate in a more enlightened way in the democratic process. Similarly, the Alliance in the Prairie State, like the agrarian crusade throughout the nation, was a voice of protest. It presented and popularized demands for reform which only a few years later were accepted by both old parties. By making an attack on the nineteenth-century concept of laissez faire, in fact, the alliance movement prepared the ground for the Progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt.

Equally important, the experiences of the alliance period taught Illinois farmers that the old rural ideas and ways must be replaced by concepts and techniques more in accord with a new urban-industrial society. The agrarian crusade, beginning with the Grangers and extending through the final defeat of the Populists in the election of 1896, was the reaction of Jeffersonian farmers to the conditions prevalent in a competitive, capitalistic economy. The first inclination of farmers imbued with the old concepts was to strive for a return to the past, to the simple America of the early nineteenth century. The successes and failures of the alliance period destroyed this dream, by demonstrating the impossibility of such a retreat, and pointed instead to procedures and practices which would protect and aid the farmer in the new order of things.

Viewed in this light, the business, educational, and political fea-

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<sup>41</sup>C. A. Robinson, *The Curse of Contraction* (Vincent Brothers Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1892), pp. 70-72.

tures of the alliance movement take on added significance. The economic enterprises of the period, crude though they were, served as the testing grounds for the great farmer-owned cooperatives of the twentieth century. Similarly, the educational activities of the agrarian groups, insofar as they pertained to the improvement of agricultural practices, appear in their full importance. The capitalistic society in which farmers found themselves was one placing major emphasis on increased productivity and increased efficiency. It was no accident, then, that the decline of Populism was followed by a burst of interest in agricultural education, especially off-campus teaching in the form of institutes and extension. Nor was it unreasonable that less than a decade after Populism disappeared as an effective force, farm leaders were cooperating with their former enemies, the railroads, in the expansion and popularization of agricultural education. Finally, the heartbreaks of the Populist period demonstrated to farmers that direct participation in politics provided no answer; in fact, it promised certain ruin to all groups engaging in it. Illinois farmers learned this hard lesson somewhat earlier than those in Kansas and Nebraska, but everywhere the answer was the same. The only possible alternative, as shown by the formation of the agricultural bloc and the political activities of the great twentieth century farm groups, was the labor technique of rewarding friends and defeating enemies, a procedure not greatly different from that advocated so long by Milton George.

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Private manuscript sources for a study of this nature unfortunately are rare; too often, leading participants did not leave personal papers. An exception to the rule is the John P. Stelle collection, which was consulted in the home of Stelle's grandson, Clarence A. Stelle of East St. Louis. The collection included an autobiographical sketch of Stelle's early life, a diary belonging to his wife, Eliza Coker Stelle, and various clippings, pamphlets, and other materials dealing with his life and career. The Ignatius Donnelly papers, located in the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, are basic to any study of Populism. The Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield, has an excellent collection of personal manuscripts relating to politics in the state, but in no case were their contributions to this study very great. Those which I found useful were the papers of Joseph G. Cannon, Shelby M. Cullom, Joseph B. Gill, John M. Palmer, and George W. Wall. The William F. Vilas collection in the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, contained a few items bearing on Milton George's activities.

Official manuscripts proved to be of greater significance in the preparation of this monograph. Among the records used were the proceedings of the Champaign County Grange and the Champaign Grange, a local society, which are located in the Illinois Historical Survey, Urbana. Manuscript proceedings of the Greene County Grange and the Social Grange, a local in that county, were consulted in the home of Miss Mabel Griswold, White Hall, Illinois, a descendant of Edward A. Giller. For information pertaining to Milton George's early life, I used tax and marriage records in the Fulton County courthouse, Lewistown, Illinois, and the manuscript census returns for Fulton County for 1860, located in the Illinois State Library, Archives, Springfield. That depository also holds the original charters of farmers' cooperative concerns as well as an excellent index to corporations covering the period 1881-96. These materials were of great value in throwing light on the economic activities of rural associations.

Additional information was supplied by a number of persons in the form of personal interviews and letters. These include the following: Mrs. Howard Berg, Atlantic, Iowa; Harvey E. Dorsey, Moro, Illinois; Dr. Andrew Hall, Mt. Vernon, Illinois; A. R. Matheny, Elizabethtown, Illinois; F. L. Sibthorp, Decatur, Illinois; John H. Nowlan, Greenville, Illinois; Clarence A. Stelle, East St. Louis, Illinois; John R. Stelle, Indianapolis, Indiana; E. F. Wall, Elizabethtown, Illinois; Mrs. Elsie Stelle Winkler, Dahlgren, Illinois.



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THE AGARIAN MOVEMENT IN ILLINOIS, 1880-1



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